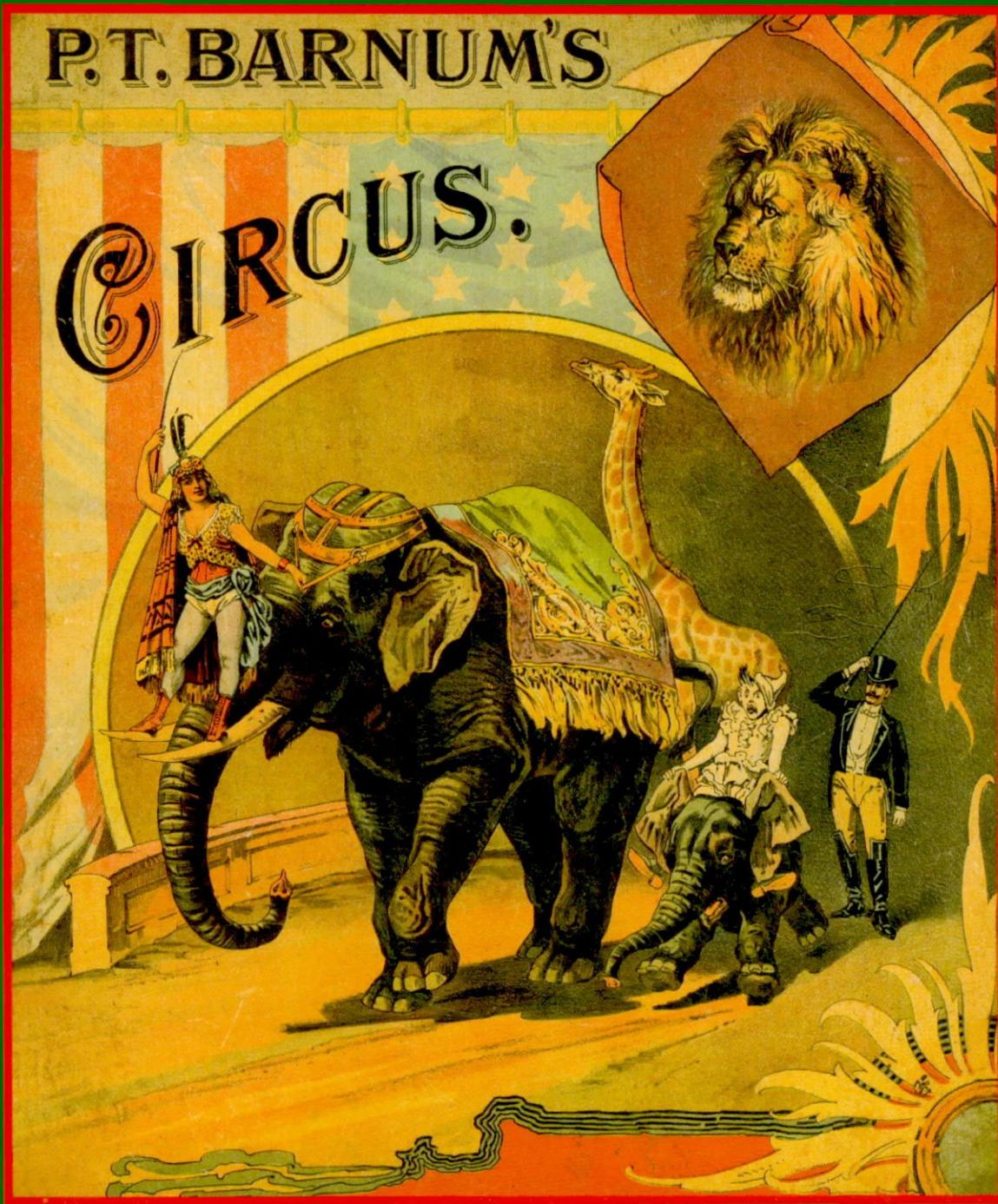


Bandwagon

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The American Circus in the 1870s: An Overview From Newspaper Sources

By Fred D. Pfening III

Today it seems insanely obvious that newspapers are by far the richest and most comprehensive source for the study of the nineteenth century American circus, which makes it even more baffling that they were rarely studied until Stuart Thayer read over a hundred thousand of them for his sublime history of ante-bellum field shows. It is not that historians did not know there was gold in those musty, dusty bound volumes. Isaac Greenwood in 1898 and R. W. G. Vail in 1934 both did considerable research in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century papers for their monographs. George Odell's masterwork on the history of entertainment in New York City also relied heavily on newspapers.

They were the exceptions. While Earl C. May's 1932 history, surely the most overrated circus book ever written, included a few quotations from nineteenth century papers, he did no research in them himself. Likewise, Col. Charles G. Sturtevant, our best sawdust scholar from the early 1920s to the early 1950s, rarely studied daily or weekly papers.

Fred Pitzer, erstwhile editor of *The Circus Scrap Book*, the pioneer circus history publication from 1929 to 1932, was an early proponent of newspaper accounts in recording circus history. Old clippings, mostly feature articles, interviews and reminiscences, filled the pages of his heroic little magazine. He assembled an extensive file of newspaper clippings in his personal collection. Perhaps he was the first to do so.

While *White Tops* and other magazines occasionally published circus-related articles from nineteenth century newspapers, it apparently occurred to no one to systematically read papers until the 1950s. Harold Gorsuch may have been the first to document the shows playing his home town by reading back issues of the local newspaper, publishing his results in the September 1956 *Bandwagon*.

Unfortunately, he did little more than list the dates shows appeared, evidently not noting any content. Others followed his method of doing little beyond creating a chronology of circus appearances in a given town. Later, a handful of amateurs actually preserved, by both hand and copying machine, the field show commentary hiding in old papers. Robert Brisendine deserves special mention for meticulously organizing his results after reading tens of thousands of nineteenth century Georgia newspapers.

For Brisendine and most other newspaper researchers mining the data was an end in itself; few of them ever turned their raw material into monographs. Some, and Brisendine again stands out, generously shared their information with others.

In the 1950s Richard E. Conover was the first writer regularly to use the results of his newspaper research in articles and books. He also made good use of others' discoveries, Brisendine's particularly. In 1958, Conover explicated the obvious: "Recent experimentation with the newspaper files in approximately thirty cities have (sic) led me to conclude that this is a lucrative source of information, and one that, collectively, could be better exploited by the membership of CHS." This sentiment is as true today as it was forty-nine years ago.

He called news accounts of circuses "the all-important thing, as the ads themselves are generally unreliable, at least as evidence for the political [by which he meant commercial] aspects of the business." He was the first to understand the significance of newspapers in research, and to point out the need to examine the material critically.



Gradually, more and more historians worked in nineteenth century papers. John Kunzog and Robert Loeffler read them extensively from the 1950s onward, publishing their results. In the 1960s and 1970s Tom Parkinson, Fred Dahlinger, John Polascek, Copeland MacAllister, Joanne Joys, Richard Flint, and others began delving into the nineteenth century press.

The sea change occurred in the mid-1970s when Stuart Thayer relied almost entirely on newspapers for his monumental three-volume history of the circus before the Civil War. Their value as sources was obvious when the finished product utterly transformed our understanding of the ante-bellum circus. Before his immersion in the nineteenth century press, our knowledge of the early circus was essentially non-existent; after his work, it is one of our best-documented periods. Before Thayer, we did not even know how little we knew. That is how important old newspapers are in comprehending our little corner of the world.

Since then, the use of old newspapers has become commonplace and our knowledge of the circus is enhanced for it. Orin King made a career out of the nineteenth century Kansas press. Bill Slout used a wide range of papers with excellent results in his books and articles. So have Janet Davis in her book, and Greg Renoff in his Ph. D. thesis. David Carolyn based much of his biography of Dan Rice on them. Nevertheless, essays relying largely on the two leading trade journals, the *New York Clipper* and *Billboard*, have outnumbered those based on the public press. Almost everything Col. Sturtevant ever wrote first appeared in the *Clipper*. Likewise, Joe Bradbury used the *Billboard* as his major or exclusive source in almost all of his work.

Why has so little research been done in newspapers even after they have been shown to be indispensable for understanding the nineteenth century circus? Perhaps my own experience provides an answer.

I began my career in crime on Saturday mornings when I was fourteen or fifteen by reading newspapers at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus. My father would drop me off, and then go to work for two or three hours as I blissfully poured through bound volumes of pristine rag-content newspapers that had the most wonderful smell imaginable. At first I was too timid to ask for specific papers; I simply read what was on hand in the reading room. After I screwed up the courage to submit request slips, I specialized in the years from the 1840s to the 1860s.

I read perhaps 10,000 papers over a three or four year period, mostly small town Ohio weeklies. A typical bound volume contained two or three years of four-page newspapers. Going through it page by page, I learned that before the Civil War Ohio villages were annually visited by two and sometimes three circuses or menageries. A brief announcement that the advance agent was in town was generally the first report that the circus was coming. A little propaganda about the show might accompany this notice. A display ad, often huge and always full of details, soon appeared. An after-notice in the issue immediately following circus day was usually the last mention that the "circus has come and gone," to use the term favored by editors.

I took notes in a standard-issue notebook in which I assiduously copied virtually every notice about the show, abstracting the data in the ad. My memory is that I read about a year every hour, often getting side tracked by the Mexican War, the California gold rush, bleeding Kansas or some other big news story. At the end of a session, I would have maybe two pages of notes, three on a good day.

I would typically have about a dozen citations ranging from a couple of sentences to a couple of paragraphs. I hand wrote everything, of course. Copying machines were not widely available, and Photostats, the most common copying technology in the 1960s, were expensive. I encountered my first microfilm reader-printer at college a few years later, but the copies it made were barely readable.

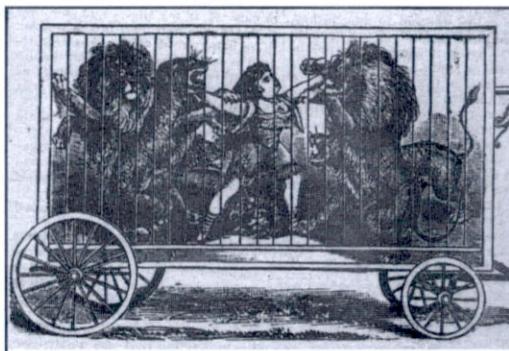
It was low-yield research, which explains why only a handful of us slogged our way through those newspapers.

Big chunks of time resulted in small amounts of new data. One could learn far more show history per hour reading the *Clipper* or *Billboard* than weekly newspapers. Excepting Stuart Thayer, no one had the time and the means to do the exhaustive newspaper research necessary to transform our understanding of field show history. For all but the most dedicated, the material simply took too long to go through.

This is no longer the case as over 100,000,000 newspaper pages are available on the Internet. Some can be accessed for free, some by an annual fee, and others only by being part of an intellectual community.

The best place to start is the Wikipedia entry for Online Newspaper Archives, which provides a gateway to historical newspaper locations on the Internet. Among the free one are the Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Utah, Washington Wyoming, and Missouri historical societies or state libraries that have digitized their newspapers

back to the mid-nineteenth century. The University of Richmond has put the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* from 1860 to 1865 online. Penn State's Pennsylvania Civil War Newspaper site has fourteen papers available from the 1850s to the 1870s, and is a



superb source for that era. The Northern New York Historical Newspapers has twenty papers going back to 1811. The local libraries in Quincy, Illinois and Cranbury, New Jersey have also put their old papers online. The Lancaster, Pennsylvania Historical Society has put the local *Columbian Spy* on the net for the years 1830 to 1889. The Historical New York Times Project, an ongoing venture sponsored by Carnegie-Mellon University, at present contains copies of the gray lady for a bit of 1852 and 1853, the decade of the 1860s, and after 1895. New York was the hub of American entertainment then as now, and the paper is an excellent resource for circuses as well as variety halls, dime museums and other venues that featured circus acts. The Brooklyn Public Library has put *The Brooklyn Eagle* for 1841 to 1902 on the web. The best available free source, it is loaded of well-written, insightful reviews of circuses, and feature articles. The Wikipedia entry adds listings all the time and it is worth checking on a monthly basis.

Other free sites include Paper of Record, which is very good for nineteenth century Canadian papers and has some early American and Caribbean numbers. The British Columbia Digital Archive enumerates about thirty locations on the web from around the world, including ones for nineteenth century Alberta, and Manitoba newspapers. Small Town Newspapers has a few pre-1900 numbers. Suffolk Historic Newspapers has five nineteenth century Long Island papers, all of which are worth examination. The Library of Congress has an ongoing project called Chronicling America, which currently has fifty papers from 1900 to 1910 online, including a few big city

dailies that are quite useful. The LC has ambitious plans. Over the next twenty years, it expects to have newspapers from 1836 to 1922 available.

By far, the biggest and best source anywhere is NewspaperARCHIVE.com, a pay site charging about \$100 a year for unlimited access. That yard note is a bargain as the site contains an astonishing 77,500,000 pages, available in an easy-to-use format. It has over 2700 different titles from over 700 cities going back to the eighteenth century. To suggest its richness, a search for the word "circus" in 1875 newspapers yields 1400 citations, while one for "elephant" produces 553. Many, perhaps most, of these entries will not be relevant to circus research, but more than enough are to make the effort well worthwhile.

The geographical distribution of the newspapers is wildly uneven. In general, the East and South are under represented. There are no Vermont papers before 1957; New Hampshire, before 1898; Tennessee, before 1916; and South Carolina, before 1929. One glimmer of light comes from the *New York Times*, which can be accessed from 1851 onward. The good news is that the Midwest is very strong for the years 1850 to 1899. Ohio has about 200 papers; Iowa, 300; and Wisconsin leads all states with over 600 papers.

Unfortunately, the Baraboo, Wisconsin papers stop at 1860, too early to be of any value in Ringling research. No Peru, Indiana papers are on the site, and the Bridgeport, Connecticut press does not begin until 1918, thus missing almost all the years it was a circus center. Some towns, however, are good sources for local circus news. Janesville, Wisconsin's coverage of Burr Robbins is excellent, as is Columbus, Ohio's for Sells Bros. after 1877.

The third category of papers is those that are prohibitively expensive for an individual to subscribe to, but are found on many academic library sites. Unfortunately, they are usually only available to members of a university community and are password protected. By being a micro-benefactor of The Ohio State University Library, I have entree to its historical newspaper database.

Ohio State's has signed up for three historical newspaper providers, Nineteenth Century U. S. Newspapers, America's Historical Newspapers, and ProQuest Historical Newspapers, a number comparable to other large universities. The major disappointment is the absence of *The Boston Globe*, which is found at many other institutions.

Nineteenth Century U. S. Newspapers is strong on the pre-Civil War period, but has good post-war runs in New Hampshire, Vermont, Kansas, and even Arkansas. Papers in Cleveland, St. Paul, and other large cities are included, with a file of Chicago's *Inter-Ocean* being the best of the big city dailies.

America's Historical Newspapers, 1690-1900, Series I and 2, also has a large holding from the early nineteenth century, but also has many post-war Georgia and Texas papers as well as the *New Orleans Times* from 1865 to 1878, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from 1860 to 1900,



the last being an essential source for research on Adam Forepaugh.

ProQuest Historical Newspapers contains all nineteenth century issues of the *New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*, three powerhouses full of information on all aspects of the circus business. Excellent performance reviews and detailed articles on show life are hallmarks of these journals.

The speed at which research is accomplished is breathtaking, about fifteen times faster than the traditional method of copying data into a notebook. Many times, I have found

more material in an hour than I had in a day reading papers in the original or on microfilm. Once the chosen site is determined, one can find information on virtually any topic in its papers by use of a key word search. For example, if one enters the word "circus," specifies the time period, locale, and newspaper, and clicks the mouse once or twice, a list of the times the word "circus" was found materializes. The researcher then picks which citations to read, and the chosen article comes on the computer screen. All this takes about ten seconds, and then, as if by magic, appears an interview with Levi North, or an article on performer salaries, or an account of an elephant going berserk, or a review of the Great Eastern Circus and on and on and on. Finally, with a few more mouse clicks the article is printed out.

Primary source material has never been so accessible. What once took a trip to a distant library or the frustrating process of an inter-library loan is now available in minutes. The blurry-eyed monotony of scanning page after page to find that one nugget of information has become outdated as the computer software finds each reference to the key word at incomprehensible speed. All the dead time spent between references is virtually eliminated. I have filled three file drawers with copies in the last twenty months, more documentation than I have assembled in the previous forty years.

Incredibly, this avalanche of information is just the beginning. Only a fraction of existing papers is uploaded. Many cities important to circus history, Cincinnati for instance, have few of their newspapers posted on the Internet. A number of state and local historical societies have plans to put their holdings online. Valuable New York City dailies have yet to be digitized, including the *New York Sun*, which took an extraordinary interest in things circus. Few foreign papers outside Canada are available. Currently, trade papers exist only in hard copy or microfilm, although there are reports that the *New York Clipper* may soon be in the ether. As the lyrics in that saccharin song go: "We've only just begun."

I have focused my Internet newspaper research on the 1870s, the years of the great transition of the circus busi-

ness from small wagon shows to huge railroad extravaganzas. What follows is an overview of that decade taken exclusively from historical newspaper sources on the Internet. The examples published here represent a minuscule percentage of the history residing in online newspapers. These articles, reviews, commentary and asides were chosen to not only inform the reader of the taste, smell and feel of the circus in the 1870s, but to suggest possibilities for further investigation. Analysis of circus history used to be constrained by the availability of primary source materials. Now after this embarrassment of riches, only the questions we ask and our energy limits us.

In an era when government intrusion into peoples' lives was practically non-existent, it's startling to encounter the hue and cry for the regulation or prohibition of trapeze performances in the early 1870s. The flying trapeze act was particularly dangerous, in part because it was a new act in which safety techniques had not yet been adopted, and in part because, amazingly as it may seem, many of the performers didn't use a net. Serious accidents continued to occur even after nets were utilized as the experience of August Seigrist demonstrates.

Dangerous Trapeze Performances, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 18 February 1870, p. 4.

The Legislature has now before it two bills—one in each Branch—the intentions of which are alike—to prohibit dangerous performances upon the trapeze. When this style of exhibition was first introduced into the circus and amphitheatre it was comparatively harmless, when the performers were men of strength, activity and experience. At the worst they might expect an occasional fall and some bruises, but life was not in peril unless under some extraordinary misfortune. But by degrees the character of these performances has increased in daring until such feats become positively frightful to beholders, causing the sensitive to shudder, and really being as little pleasure to the spectators as to the performers. Under the increasing emulation among gymnasts, they have carried their trapeze apparatus to the ceilings of theatres, risking falls of twenty, thirty and forty feet in case they should miss their hold on the bars. They have added fearful flights through the air from bar to bar. These were formerly not more than from six to eight feet apart, but the distance has been increased until fifteen, twenty and perhaps twenty-five feet of space is left between each bar. The flight between these bars is a contest of muscular strength against gravity. The performer makes, as it were, a point blank shot—he flies on a straight line from bar to bar. To keep himself upon the proper level is a matter which requires great redress, and beyond that he must have the power to catch the bar and grasp it at the right moment. Most of these performers compel children to take part in their dangerous act, and these poor little creatures, whose strength is but feeble and whose experience is limited, are in constant peril. The trapeze performance is unpleasant to every person who possesses feelings of humanity; it is dangerous to life and limb, and it should hereafter be entirely abolished or put under such regulations that no harm can come even to the most

careless performer.

Down with the Trapeze, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 14 May 1870, p. 1.

A report and ordinance have passed one branch of the Baltimore city council which reads as follows: "It shall not be lawful to exhibit in this city any trapeze performances, or feats of a like character in which the performer leaves a bar or bars, rope or ropes, ring or rings, or any support, unless a net sufficiently large and strong to catch the performer or performers, in case of failing, be provided and said net to be made of material that will not injure performers in case of falling." A violation of the ordinance subjects the person so offending to a penalty not less than \$50 nor more than \$100. This is the first action taken to put a stop to these brutal and cruel exhibitions, and should be followed by every city and town in the country. The horrible suffering of those victims of the trapeze who have fallen and been crippled for life, call for the interference of the law to prevent any further misery.

Dangerous Amusements, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 31 May 1870, p. 2.

A young woman who disports herself with a couple of lions for the public entertainment was set upon the other evening by one of the "tame" beasts and fearfully lacerated by its jaws. A trapeze performer at a New York theatre fell last night from his mid-air perch to the stage and was crushed to a shapeless mass. Some of the newspapers taking these harrow-incidents as a text call for the suppression of such dangerous exhibitions. It is useless to make such a demand; if people see fit to trust themselves to the mercy of wild animals, or to run the nightly risk of breaking their necks to amuse the public, and the public will patronize such exhibitions. There is no law to suppress them. The element of danger which attends these performances is really their chief attraction, and though the audience may not literally calculate on the possibility of witnessing such catastrophes as lately befell the unfortunate Lion Queen and the aerial gymnast, the possibility of such occurrences is ever present to the mind during the performance and gives a zest to its enjoyment by those whose taste inclines them to such exhibitions. It requires just as much skill to perform these trapeze feats ten feet from the ground as it does at fifty; but a gymnast who should undertake a performance at a safe elevation would not be tolerated. He must ascend to a dizzy height where a slip is fatal to satisfy the exacting taste of the audiences. Experience has shown that wild animals, particularly those of the cat tribe, are never to be trusted no matter how thoroughly they may have been tamed, or cowed into fear of their keepers. Their natural instincts will break out once in a while, and the life of the so-called beast tamer is in constant peril. The story of the man who followed a menagerie all over Europe and attended every performance with the firm conviction that the performer who put his head in the lion's mouth would risk it once too often, and he wished to be on hand to witness the final catastrophe, illustrates the general impression of the risk involved in such performances.

It is a question how far government has a right to interfere to suppress exhibitions of a dangerous or immoral

character. It is impossible to satisfactorily draw the line of toleration in any legal enactment, the regulation of such things must be left to public taste. And public taste will, in time, ease to tolerate or approve of such exhibitions. The same progress in education and refinement of feeling which led to the suppression of bear baiting, badger drawing and cock-fighting, favorite amusements of our ancestors, as brutal and disgusting will lead in time to the discountenancing of all entertainments involving peril to life and limb.

Circus Accident, *The Titusville Morning Herald*, Titusville, Pennsylvania, 21 July 1871, p. 3.

August Seigrist of the Paris Pavilion Circus, which recently exhibited here, met with a serious accident at Rochester. While Seigrist was performing the somersault in mid-air in the flying trapeze feat, the violent gale which was blowing at the time swayed the tent somewhat, and caused Seigrist to fall in catching hold of his brother, and he fell. A netting was held beneath to catch him in case such an accident should occur, and he fell outside of it and came heavily to the ground. He was picked up by members of the company and carried to the dressing-room. It was found that he had sustained severe bruises, especially on the shoulder upon which he fell. In the evening the trapeze feat did not take place, and Dan Rice apologized for the omission by referring to the injuries received by Seigrist—hurts which will prevent him from going through with the performance for some time to come.

One would conclude from examining newspapers from the 1870s that showmen and civilians were killed by exotic animals on a weekly basis. In this case, three members of James Robinson & Co.'s band died during parade when the roof of the lion cage upon which they were sitting collapsed after the wagon hit a rock.

In the Lions' Den. An Appalling and Horrible Occurrence—Three of Robinson's Circus Men Killed and Four Shockingly Lacerated by Savage Beasts. *San Antonio Express*, San Antonio, Texas, 29 June 1870, p. 2.

The unusually quiet little village of Middletown [Missouri] was lately thrown into a painful fever of excitement on the morning of May 12th, by an awful catastrophe, which occurred to the band lately attached to James Robinson & Co.'s circus and animal show, and led by Prof. M. C. Sexton.

Upon starting out from Cincinnati for the season, the management of James Robinson's circus and animal show determined to produce something novel in the way of a band chariot and conceived the idea of mounting the band upon the colossal den of performing Numidian (sic) lions, and which would form one of the principal and most imposing features of the show.

Although repeatedly warned by Professor Sexton that he deemed the cage insecure and dangerous in the

extreme, the managers still persisted in compelling the band to ride upon it. Nothing, however, occurred until the fatal morning of 12th.

The band took their places and the procession commenced to move amid the shouts of the multitude of rustics who had assembled to witness the grand pageant, and hear the enlivening strains of music. Not a thought of danger was entertained by any one, but the awful catastrophe was about to occur.

As the driver endeavored to make a turn in the streets the leaders became entangled and threw the entire team into confusion, and he lost control of them, and becoming frightened they broke into a violent run. Upon the opposite side of the street the fore-wheel of the cage came in contact with a rock with such force as to cause the braces and stanchions which supported the roof to give away, thereby precipitating the entire band into the awful pit below.

For an instant the vast crowd were paralyzed with fear, but for a moment only, and then arose such a shriek of agony as was never heard before. The awful groans of terror and agony which arose from the poor victims who were being torn, lacerated by the frightful monsters below, was heartrending and sickening to a terrible degree.

Every moment some one of the band would extricate themselves from the debris and leap over the sides of the cage to the ground with a wild spring and faint away upon striking the earth, so great was their terror. But human nature could not stand and see men literally devoured before their very eyes, for there were willing hearts and strong arms ready to render every assistance necessary to rescue the unfortunate victims of this shocking calamity.

A hardware store which happened to stand opposite was invaded by the request of the noble-hearted proprietor, and pitch-forks, crowbars and long bars of iron, and in fact every available weapon was brought into requisition. The side-doors of the cage were quickly torn from their fastenings, and then a horrible sight was presented to view. Mingled among the brilliant uniform of the poor unfortunate [bandsmen] lay legs, arms torn from their sockets and half-devoured, while the savage brutes glared ferociously with their sickly green-colored eyes upon the petrified crowd. Professor Charles White arrived at this moment and gave orders in regard to extricating the dead and wounded—he well knowing it would be a difficult and dangerous under-taking to remove them from the infuriated monsters.

Stationing men with forks and bars at every available point, he sprang fearlessly into the den amid the (savage) monsters, and commenced raising the wounded, and passing them upon the outside to their friends. He had succeeded in removing the wounded, and was proceeding to gather up the remains of the lifeless, when the mammoth lion, known to showmen as old Nero, sprang with a frightful roar upon his keeper, fastening his teeth and claws in his neck and shoulders, lacerating him



in a horrible manner. Professor White made three herculean efforts to shake the monster off, but without avail, and gave order to fire upon him.

The contents of four of Colt's navys were immediately poured into the carcass of the ferocious animal, and he fell dead; and the brave little man, notwithstanding the fearful manner in which he was wounded, never left the cage until every vestige of the dead was carefully gathered together and placed upon a sheet for burial. It was found that three of the ten were killed outright, and four others terribly lacerated. The names of the killed are August Schoer, Conrad Freiz, and Charles Greiner. Coffins were procured and an immediate burial determined upon, as the bodies were so frightful torn and lacerated as to be unrecognizable to their most intimate friends. It was a melancholy day for Middleton, and a sadder day for the friends and companions of the deceased.

Of all the vast multitude who started out in the morning with anticipations of a glad holiday few left for their homes with dry eyes after the triple funeral—for the entire community followed the remains to the quiet little cemetery. At midnight the carcass of the slain beast was quietly buried on the lot where was intended to be given the exhibition, but which was never accomplished. There is a terrible responsibility resting upon some one which should be thoroughly investigated, and guilty parties be brought to a quick and speedy punishment. The lions are the same ones which nearly cost Prof. Charles White his life two years ago, while traveling with the Thayer & Noyes party, and were known to be a very dangerous cage of animals. Every attention is being given to the sufferers by the kind and hospitable citizen[s] of Middletown, and at last accounts they were all pronounced out of danger.—From the Middletown (Missouri) Banner.

The accuracy of circus reporting in nineteenth century newspapers is a salient question since so much show history resides in the surviving papers. Did a show receive a positive review on merit or because of abundant advertising? Did a dreadful notice reflect a truly terrible performance or a vengeful editor who didn't receive the passes he wanted? The prevalence of reviews declaring the most recent circus the best ever, examples of which are found elsewhere in this compilation, suggests factors other than the quality of the performance influenced some appraisals. Richard E. Conover, the first person to routinely mine information in newspapers, was skeptical of complimentary after-notices, particularly in small town weeklies, going so far as to assert that in some cases circus press agents composed the reviews. Recent scholars have been less incredulous, being more inclined to accept after-notices on face value. In any case, the careful investigator should entertain the possibility that news articles and reviews have more complicated intentions than might appear at first glance. The following

brief observations hint at newspapers' attitude toward field shows.

Daily Express, San Antonio, Texas, 9 August 1870, p. 3.

Robinson's Circus is on its way to Texas, and is reported en route for Austin. We hope that it will make a better showing of decency and actual merit than the last one. Should it visit our city, it will be more than welcome if it is beyond the pale of those miserable one-horse shows that year after year have infested our towns, buying up the silence of the press in regard to their real demerits. The public may rest assured that under all circumstances the "Express" intends to be just in its criticisms, and will "puff" no tumble down concern for the sake of a dollar or two to be made in advertising,

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 12 June 1875, p. 1.

The rural papers of North Carolina announce that the failure of a circus concern down there was entirely due to a lack of advertising, and sternly remark: "Let this be a warning to others."

Defiance Democrat, Defiance, Ohio, 19 April 1877, p. 4.

The Democrat will feel grateful if half a dozen circuses visit Defiance this summer. Circus advertisements are generally profitable.

Burlington Hawk-Eye, Burlington, Iowa, 24 May 1877, p. 1.

The western papers are not so much interested in the president's policy just now, as they are in figuring up just how much money they can wring out of the circus for a double column ad, and local notices c. o. d., exclusive of complimentaries.

Stevens Point Daily Journal, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 19 July 1879, p. 3.

The great New York Circus is to exhibit here next Wednesday. A big crowd is expected. Can't the correspondent of the Journal have a complementary for this notice?

Acts of God such as storms, lightning and high winds constantly assaulted circuses. Based on a cursory investigation it would appear the consequences of these incidents

were more severe and occurred more frequently in the 1870s than in later decades. Perhaps showmen became better weathermen as the years went by, or equipment and safety procedures improved. In any case, circus men had to constantly contend with vicious weather. One sentence in the first report tells us all we need to know that we are dealing with a time vastly different than our own: "After a time, when the killed and wounded had been removed, the performance was resumed, but to a very slim audience." It brings to mind Leslie Poles Hartley's aphorism: "The past is a foreign country; they do things dif-



ferently there."

A Terrible Thunder Storm, Bailey's Circus Struck by Lightning, *Essex County Republican*, Keeseville, New York, 1 September 1870, p. 2.

Friday night last, one of the most terrible thunder storms on record broke over the town of Kingston, N. Y., during the performance of [G. F.] Bailey's circus troupe before an audience of about six thousand people. A bolt descended at about 8 p. m., striking the south side of the tent near the top, making a tremendous rent, and passing through and across the tent, where it struck and shivered a tree standing just outside.

Near the tree was a peach vender's wagon, around which a crowd of people had gathered, and of these, five were instantly killed. The horse was killed and the wagon shattered into a thousand pieces.

George F. Bailey ad used in 1870.
Pfening Archives.

The scene within the tent is described as one of the most terrible ever witnessed. As the thunderbolt fell, the performers stopped short, standing in the ring as though paralyzed; while the audience, ghastly with fear, arose in wild confusion, each rushing madly toward the entrance to the tent.

The caged beasts roared loudly with fear and terror, and it was well that they were so safely confined as to defy their frantic efforts to escape. To add to the confusion, the rain began to descend in torrents, and when the audience, after pushing and pressing, got out of doors, they were thoroughly drenched in a moment. After a time, when the killed and wounded had been removed, the performance was resumed, but to a very slim audience.

It is impossible to give the names of the killed and wounded, as many were carried [a]way at once by their friends. About fifty persons in the immediate vicinity were knocked down. Inside the tent scores were stunned and quite a number slightly burned by the lightning. Several persons were wounded by splinters, etc., and many received severe injuries during the rush to the open air.

Account of the Recent Storm at Kingston. Remarkable effect of Lightning, *Essex County Republican*, Keeseville, New York, 8 September 1870, p. 2.

The following are further details of the storm in which Bailey's circus was struck by lightning:

The play of the lightning and the roar of the thunder are described as dazzling and deafening beyond all past experiences. The atmosphere during the day was oppressively sultry, the mercury indicating 92 degrees in the

NOW OPEN.
AT BOSTON FAIR GROUNDS,

1870
NEWTON STREET AND HARRISON AVENUE,
EVERY AFTERNOON
—AND—
EVERY EVENING
THIS WEEK,
BAILEY & CO'S
GRAND CARAVAN
—AND—
GREAT CIRCUS.
THE OLDEST, THE LARGEST, THE MOST IN-
STRUCTIVE, UNOBJECTIONABLE, AND THE BEST
PAVILION EXHIBITION IN THE WORLD. Go and
see the
RHINOCEROS AND BABY LIONS,
ACTING ELEPHANTS
—AND—
Wild Beasts and Rare Birds,
From all parts of the world. In the Circus.

shade. The earth was dry and parched, and the air was filled with smoke, which settled in the river so as to hide the eastern bank from view. At noon on Thursday the smoke for the first time in a week began to lift, and later in the day, there were observed gathering in the horizon at all points, murky clouds, huge "cumulus," rolling together and seemingly concentrated their strength for one grand display of power. At dark the electric display became grand beyond description. For miles the storm clouds hung over the river, and the lightning flashed incessantly. Despite the warnings of the approaching storm, hundreds of men, women and children thronged the Union Avenue route to Geo. F. Bailey & Co.'s circus tent which had been pitched in a desirable spot on that avenue, so that by the time the performance commenced there could not have been less than 1,500 persons within the tent. This was just before 8 p. m., and large drops of rain had already commenced to patter upon the canvass, while the roaring thunder without almost drowned the voice of the ring master within. A short distance from the main tent was a smaller tent used as a fruit stand, and a few feet from this stand stood a willow tree in the corner of the yard of an adjoining dwelling. On the corner of the circus-ground under and near the tree were grouped a large number of persons who had taken shelter there from the storm. Under the fruit tent were also congregated about 25

persons, while hitched to the tree spoken of was a horse attached to a wagon, a colored man being seated in the latter. Faster fell the big drops of rain, and more brilliant and more rapid became the flashes of lightning, till suddenly one blinding sheet of flame lit up the entire scene, and a peal of thunder followed instantaneously which shook the earth, while the air seemed impregnated with a sulphuric smell. The scene which then occurred inside the circus tent baffles description.—Pallid faces were everywhere, and a fearful panic was imminent, but the great presence of mind of Mr. Bailey, the proprietor of the circus, saved hundreds of lives. He shouted, "Keep your seats!" and called on the band to play, while at the same time he urged the performing horses about the ring through little lakes of water hoping thereby to attract the attention of the audience so as to save a rush and a consequent trampling to death and well he succeeded. The clown cracked his jokes and laughed as hard as ever, but it could easily be seen that it was not a natural laugh, and that he too was thoroughly alarmed. While all this was going on inside, the fatal shaft of lightning had done its work outside. The bolt appeared to come from the west or south-west, cutting a hole about twelve feet through the top of the main canvass thence across an open space

to the willow tree spoken of above forty yards distant, shattering that tree, killing the horse which was tied to it, and knocking senseless the driver, tearing the soles from his boot, and singeing his clothing. Passing from thence it descended to the group of colored persons near the tree. Five were instantly killed—struck down with smiles and jokes upon their lips. Twenty-five persons under the first tent were knocked down and severely injured. Hundreds under the main tent were paralyzed, and incidents of an extraordinary nature were visible everywhere. When the true state of affairs became known under the main canvas, there was no holding the audience and then the entertainment for the evening ended at once. As a rush was made for the open air, it was ascertained that scores of persons could not leave their seats. All of them were more or less injured. One man had a part of his coat torn away, and another had lost the rim of his hat, and dozens were almost unconscious. They sat like statutes, and there was a gaze of vacancy in their eyes that was frightful to look upon. Friends shook them and urged them to go, but they moved not. The Kingston Gazette of Friday thinks there were 250 persons more or less injured and says:—"The compositors of the Gazette attended the show, and every one of them received injury, and some were seriously hurt. On assembling our forces at midnight not a man was able to work, and had not the employees of the Press office come to our relief, no paper could have been issued Friday morning. It is a noteworthy fact the bodies of the dead bore no marks of violence whatever; not a particle of evidence is observable to show that they died other than natural deaths—a fact which excites general comment. The eyes of one of the deceased remained wide open, presenting a ghastly appearance."

A Circus Tent Upset by a Whirlwind—A Few Persons Injured and Many More Scared, *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, Illinois, 24 October 1870, p. 1.

Special Despatch to the Chicago Tribune.

Mansfield [Ohio], Oct. 23—On Friday evening last a furious whirlwind struck the tent of Van Amburgh & Co., who were exhibiting at Belleville, in this county, tearing it from its moorings, strewing the canvas around promiscuously and even overturning some of the cages of animals. There was a fearful hubbub for a time, the brute animals howling, and humans screaming, yelling, cursing, and imploring in their frenzy of fright. The elephant took advantage of the confusion to escape to the country, but was soon overtaken and secured. Quite a number of persons were injured, a little girl and a man seriously. The little girl, it is stated, has since died. The names of any of the injured have not yet reached here.

Deseret News, Salt Lake City, Utah, 9 November 1870, p. 12.

A circus in a storm.—This evening, at Bellville, Ohio, about the middle of the performance in Van Amburgh's



menagerie, a sudden gust of rain and wind came on. The tent was tossed about in a frightful manner. The audience rushed from their seats in every direction. Under the direction of the manager the show men sprang to the ropes and lowered the centre of the tent; but the wind proved too strong for them. The chains and the ropes on the west side were broken, and the immense tent was lifted many feet high, and carried sheer over the heads of the people and fell on the east side of the ground. The lights were extinguished and pitch darkness prevailed. The large centre

poles and other smaller poles were dragged by the ropes through the people, and fell among them, crushing and maiming quite a number. The people, blinded by the darkness, rushed in every direction, supposing they were coming toward the village, till many of them found themselves on the banks of the Clear Forks, farther from home than when they started.

Dr. N. D. Whitcomb, who was wounded in the head and arm, seeing one of the lights in the village, made for it. When he got nearly to it he saw something white shining in the darkness. On closer scrutiny he recognized the tusks of the elephant Tippo Saib, who had broken loose and was leaving the show in disgust. While the doctor was reflecting on the best method of capturing him, he saw something white approach, which proved to be the keeper, who appeared sans unmentionables, having been in the act of dressing for the performance with the elephant when the catastrophe occurred.

The lion's cage was caught by the ropes and overset, falling upon Professor Langworthy, the lion tamer, and seriously injuring him.

It is too soon to know the number of persons injured. A little daughter of Mr. William Gehart was struck on the forehead and the skull badly fractured. A daughter of Mr. David Steltz is so badly hurt that her life is despaired of. Miss Rosie White, Miss Emma Charles, Miss Agnes Garey, Dr. Whitcomb, Andrew Evarts, Addison Hamilton and doubtless many others whose names I have not yet learned were more or less injured.

It is proper to add that no blame can be attached to the managers of the show, as the tent was secured as well as such tents usually are.

One lady was struck upon the head by a pole, but her waterfall received the blow and doubtless saved her life.—*Cin. Commercial*, Oct. 21.

Newspapers, and by extension their middle-class readers, often carped about poor people irresponsibly spending their money at the circus rather than using it for some more worthwhile purpose. Not surprisingly, editors were particularly irritated when late-paying or non-subscribers were seen on the show lot.

South Side Signal, Babylon, New York, 29 October 1870, p. 2.

Who Went to the Circus.—People went to the circus, of

course. The man who can't afford to take a paper went, and took his wife and children and spent twice the value of a useful family journal. The man who owes the store-keeper and the butcher, and who "really hasn't the money to pay," went and spent two or three dollars. The man who can't afford to buy a ticket to a good lecture or concert, went. A great many people who will need their money went. The American citizen of African descent—to be sure. The man who didn't care anything for the circus, but went to see the wild beasts, went. The man who didn't want to see it himself, but went only to take the children, was on hand. Lastly several other people went—at night—who did not like to be seen going in the day time.

Grand Traverse Herald, Traverse City, Michigan, 22 June 1871, p. 7.

The man who "cannot afford to take a newspaper" was at the circus the other day with his wife and children. We presume he made special effort for the occasion so that his children might "see something and not grow up in ignorance."

Wise man! Thoughtful and prudent father!

In 1869 and 1870 three circus owners, William Lake, Clark T. Ames, and Harry Whitby, were shot and killed during beefs with locals. Besides these three worthies, many underlings, too numerous to mention, met violent ends, often at the hands of intoxicated customers. It was open season on showmen. Lake, Ames, and Whitby were all killed in former slave-holding states. Soon after, the New York Clipper published a rare editorial decrying circus violence in the South.

A Most Foul and Fatal Affray at Dawson—Two Men Killed and a Lady Wounded, *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, Macon, Georgia, 8 November 1870, p. 3.

From Col. Stephens, Business Agent of Col. C. T. Ames' circus and menagerie, and also from Mr. Neal Munroe, door-keeper to the side show, we get the particulars of a most foul and murderous affray that occurred at Dawson on Wednesday afternoon last, just after the performances had commenced under the large canvas.

Mr. Munroe says that a man named R. J. Russell approached the door of the side show in an intoxicated state, and asked the price of admittance. He was told 25 cents. Russell then told his wife and children, six or eight



in number, to go in and he would pay the bill. When they had gone in he asked how much it was, Munroe told him 9 had passed in, Russell said there were only four, and Munroe then started to call the family back to satisfy Russell he was mistaken. Whereupon Russell got angry and struck the door-keeper a blow that knocked him nearly down and against the canvas. Russell then drew his pistol and thrust it in the door-keeper's face and threatened to blow his brains out. Munroe told him he did not intend to offend him, but Russell began to cock his pistol, when Munroe dodged down and ran inside the canvas.

Col. C. T. Ames, who was standing near the ticket wagon, a few paces off, saw the difficulty and walked up and told Russell that was not the place to get up a fuss, and draw his pistol where there were so many women and children; to be quiet and he would make it all right. Russell then turned upon Col. Ames, and remarked that he would kill him, too, if he interfered, and fired at the Colonel. Mr. Boynton, an attaché of the circus, also spoke to Russell, and as he did so, two brothers named Charles and John Kelly, and known as desperate men, rushed up, and drawing their pistols, began to fire upon the Colonel and Mr. Boynton. They retreated and attempted to run under the canvas, and in the act of so doing Col. Ames received two shots—one slightly wounding him in the thigh and the other, striking him on the inside of the hip, passed through into the bowels.

During this shooting a Mr. Daniel Oxford, a brother-in-law of Russell, was accidentally shot through the heart, while standing near with a little child in his arms. He fell forward upon the child and it was taken from under the dead man. One of the shots also passed through the canvas of the side show, and wounded Madame Frew, mother of the Albino children, in the thigh, but not seriously.

We append a written statement handed us, giving an account of Col. Ames last moments, etc.:

Col. Ames died at Dawson, Thursday November 3rd, 4 1/2 p. m., from a gunshot wound in the abdomen, at the residence of Capt. F. M. McKinney. The parities implicated in the assassination were Charles and John Kelly and Robt. J. Russell, reputed desperadoes, all, and residents of Terrell County, eight miles east of Dawson. The bereaved widow of Col. Ames was treated with the utmost kindness, and every thing that could be done to console her. Among the many influential citizens that were untiring in their acts of kindness were Messrs. J. R. Thompson, C. C. Turfs, D. A. Cochran, S. R. Weston, Z. T. Harris, P. J. Sharp, Z. Z. Solomon.

The medical attendants consisted of Drs. Cheathan and Hodnette. In his last moments the Colonel was attended by Reverends J. M. Marshall and Paine, affording spiritual consolation—he being in the full use of all his faculties to the last.

At a called session of the City Council of Dawson, at eight o'clock a. m., November 4th, resolutions of deep sympathy were extended to the bereaved widow and family of the lamented Colonel, and as a testimonial of the respect in which the Colonel was held in the State, the meeting appointed the following committee to escort the remains to Macon: J. W. Johnson, J. P. Sharp, J. H. Crouch, N. C. Greer, R. C. Mizel and J. W. Loyless.

The scene of the Colonel's last moments between himself and W. A. McKinney, the son of Capt. McKinney at whose residence he died—was quiet affecting—they being warm friends.

The funeral cortege in Macon consisted of the City Council of Dawson, the wife and brother of the Colonel, Mr. B. M. Steens, Messrs. Boynton, Murphy and Sullivan, led by the beautiful Silver Cornet Band, under the Colonel's old friend, Harry McCarthy.

We have but to add that the affair is one of the most heartless, uncalled for and shameful outrages, that ever occurred in the State. Those who are responsible for it should be made to suffer the severest penalties of the law. The people of the whole State look to the authorities of Terrell County to punish the perpetrators of this most foul murder. Justice, law, the peace and order of society, and the security of life, all demand it. Guard the murderers well against escape, fellow-citizens of Terrell, and at all hazards bring them to justice.

Homicide of Colonel Ames, *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, Macon, Georgia, 6 December 1870, p. 6.

The following special dispatch from Dawson, giving the result of the trial of John Kelly for the murder of Colonel Ames, will surprise the public; but we know nothing of the evidence before the jury:

Dawson, Ga., December 2. *Editor, Telegraph and Messenger*: The verdict of the jury in the case of States against John Kelly, for murder of Colonel C. T. Ames, proprietor of the New Orleans Circus, in November last, was "Not guilty."

While this article's title promises only the biography of a circus rider, the narrative goes far beyond that to give an excellent overview of the business in the last years of the horse-conveyed, one-ring circus. Many of the themes reiterated throughout the 1870 are expressed here: child performers are not mistreated, clowns aren't funny anymore, show people lead moral, sober lives, press agents occasionally use hyperbole, the frequency of riots on show grounds has decreased in the North, increased in the South. Originally appearing in the New York Sun, this story was picked up by other papers, a common occurrence then as now. The Sun covered circuses in more depth than other urban dailies and while it is currently available on the Internet only from 1900 to 1910, scores of earlier articles were reprinted in papers that can be accessed online.

The Circus Rider's Life, *Defiance Democrat*, Defiance, Ohio, 28 January 1871, p. 1, From the New York Sun.

To become a good circus rider, it is necessary that the art should be practiced from childhood, in order that the performer may acquire the requisite balance, as it is termed, or the trick of adapting the position of the person to the motion of the horse. Small children catch this faculty in an incredibly short time, and soon come to feel almost as much at ease while stranding on the horse's back as when on the ground; while, as they grow up in constant practice, each year as it passes gives them more and more confidence, and an additional sense of security while executing the most difficult feats. It is nearly impossible for a full grown man or woman to gain this balance; but to children reared in the business, the move-

ments required to maintain their equilibrium come as naturally as those of walking or running. The younger the child when he begins his lessons, the greater is the probability of his acquiring a perfect balance.

HOW CHILDREN ARE TRAINED

The training of children for the circus ring is not attended with anything like the danger that is generally supposed, as every precaution is taken to guard against accident. This is necessary not only from motives of humanity, but also from self-interest; for if a child, when beginning his practice, is unlucky enough to get severe falls, he becomes cowed and cowardly, and, being in constant dread of injury, is too timid to willingly attempt any difficult feats, and too much frightened to accomplish them successfully if induced to make the attempt. When a child is first put upon a horse he has a belt around his waist, attached to which [is] a ring or loop. Through this ring a cord is passed, one end of which is fastened to the pommel of the pad, or broad saddle used by circus riders, while the other is used by the instructor, so that however often the pupil may miss his footing, he is prevented from falling to the ground. To accustom the pupil to the movements of the horse, he is at first placed astride the animal's back, and practiced in that position until he can hold himself firmly and easily in his seat, without bouncing or swerving from side to side. If the pupil is a girl, she is taught to ride with her feet hanging over the near side of the pad. The next step is to accustom the child to the movement of getting upon his feet while the horse is in motion, and then returning to the first position. This getting on and off the feet is kept up for a long time, until it can be accomplished with ease and certainty. Then the pupil is taught to balance himself in different positions, to stand on one foot and to leap. When the child has acquired sufficient skill and confidence, the safety cord is dispensed with, and he is instructed how to leap from his horse to the ground, great pains being taken with this point in order that he may be able to save himself from injury in case of a stumble on the part of the animal he is riding or a "miss" on his own. After this, the course of instruction pursued depends altogether upon the ability of the teacher and the progress made by the pupil.

GYMNASTS AND ACROBATS

Nearly all the novel features introduced in circus performances during the last twenty years have been of a gymnastic and acrobatic character. The most noticeable of them, the flying trapeze, was the invention of the famous Leotard. The ordinary double trapeze was first given in this country at the Hippodrome, where the Fifth Avenue Hotel now stands; it is done in all the gymnasiums at the present time. Still vaulting, or throwing a great number of somersaults consecutively from a spring board, one of the standard attractions of the old-time circus, is seldom witnessed now, having given away to the more exciting act of somersaulting over horses. It would pay to revive it. Gymnastic performances are more plentiful than riders, as they can learn the business at any age so long as they have strength and activity, while, as has already been stated, equestrians must begin their practice in childhood. Some of the finest gymnasts in the country entered upon their physical education after arriving at man's estate.

CONCERNING CLOWNS

In old times, the clown was always a fine performer, often the best in the company. The ludicrous gravity with which he would bungle at and burlesque the feats of the other performers, and then suddenly pitch in and outdo them all, never failed to make him the first favorite with the spectators. But we seldom see one of this stamp nowadays. He has given way to the talking clown, who is generally the most dreary personage imaginable. Yet there are a few of these who can make considerable fun, a few who can tell original jokes occasionally, and a very few who can speak the English language correctly. There is one variety of the tribe, however that is altogether intolerable, and not to be endured—the preaching clown, an individual who gets off stupid, smutty jokes, and lectures his audience upon their moral duties. This species is not so plentiful now as a few years ago.

HOW CIRCUS PERFORMERS ARE PAID

Circus riders can well afford to stand a good many hard knocks during their apprenticeship, in consideration of the high salaries they receive after they have learned their business and come of age. First-class riders get all the way from \$75 to \$350 per week for their services, with their expenses while traveling; but it must be a rider of extraordinary merit who can command over \$100 per week, while almost anybody who can keep on his feet three times around the ring can get from \$20 to \$30. Pretty good riders get from \$30 to \$150 per week, with traveling expenses. Female riders receive from \$30 to \$150 per week, according to their ability and their shrewdness in making an engagement. A good rider who has three or four smart children or apprentices can command a very large salary. Men who throw somersaults over horses are called leapers, and sometimes get as much as \$75 per week for that act alone, doing no other performance. Gymnasts usually go in couples, and receive from \$30 to \$125 per week for the two. Contortionists get from \$20 to \$60 per week for kinking themselves. Clowns usually command from \$20 to \$100 per week, according to ability and reputation. A clown who is well known and popular through the country, is worth more than an equally good one who is unknown, as his name on the bills is an attraction, the clown being the most important personage in the show, in the eyes of rural amusement seekers. One noted clown has received a salary of \$1000 per week for a season of seven months; but his included the services of some apprentices, the use of various horses and animals, and the use of his name as the ostensible proprietor of the circus with which he traveled.

THE HABITS OF CIRCUS PEOPLE

It is generally received opinion that circus people as a class are dissipated and immoral. This is unjust, so far as a large portion of the profession are concerned. Circus people are very much like other folks—there are good, bad and indifferent among them. Some are strict teetotalers, others take an occasional glass, and there are those who go beyond the bounds of moderation in their use of strong drink; but, taken as a body, circus performers will compare favorably in regard to sobriety with almost any class of traveling men, the itinerant clergy

perhaps excepted. One thing is certain, namely: that habitual and excessive indulgence in intoxicating liquors would soon utterly unfit a circus rider or gymnast for the purpose of his vocation.

The female performers nearly always marry men in the circus business, and generally make good wives and mothers. The male performers, if young and good looking, have many opportunities for intrigue, as there are always silly women upon whom silk fleshings and glittering spangles exert a singular fascination; and it is not to be supposed that the heroes of the sawdust circle are more virtuous than the majority of mankind.

CIRCUS HORSES

It is seldom that a blooded horse is seen in the circus ring. Strong legs, a broad, flat back, a short, easy gait are the chief requisites for a circus rider's steed; but color is also a consideration, pie-bald or "calico" horses being deemed the most attractive, and after them those which are spotted, cream-colored and pure white. For the manege, or "high school" of equitation as it is generally termed in Europe, thoroughbred horses are considered the best, as they are more intelligent, more graceful in their movements, and more stylish than animals with a pedigree. The process of training a circus horse to run in the circle is very simple. The head is brought into the proper position by straps extending from the bit to the pad, and the horse is exercised with a long rein until he is accustomed to the routine of galloping around the ring, which is usually about forty-two feet in diameter. Then the rider mounts him and endeavors to familiarize the animal with the pressure in all sorts of positions; leaps in the air, coming down heavily, so as to accustom the horse to the shock, that he may not start from under the rider when the latter alights upon the pad. The horse is then run under "objects," such as paper hoops, strips of muslin, and the like, until he becomes entirely indifferent to them, and other simple means are used to render him steady, trustworthy and uniform in his gait—the latter a point of great importance, as it is impossible for a performer to ride a good act unless his horse runs steadily and true. In training trick horses, nearly every trainer has a trick of his own; but it may be mentioned that Rarey's method of tying up one of the fore legs of a horse, in order to handle him the better, has been practiced in circuses from time immemorial. The training of the manege or dancing horses was reduced to a science by the celebrated Boucher of Paris, who wrote a book on the subject.

CIRCUS TRAVELING

There are but two cities in the country that have a circus among their regular places of amusements—New York and Philadelphia—but there is scarcely a town of 2,000 population, from Maine to Oregon, that is not visited every year by one or more traveling circus companies, while the canvas amphitheater is frequently erected in localities where a tavern, a grocery, and a blacksmith's shop are about the only buildings visible. During the past summer thirty or more circuses were traveling in the various parts of the country of which two started from this city, one from Philadelphia, three from Connersville, Indiana, one from Danbury, Conn., one from Fonda, N. Y., one from Girard, Pa., one from New Orleans, two

from Hudson, one from Bridgeport, one from Cincinnati, one from Indianapolis, one from Birmingham, Ohio, one from Utica, one from Galesburg, Ill., one from Providence and one from San Francisco, while half a dozen or more were traveling at the opening of the season, having gone South during the previous winter. A traveling season usually consists of about twenty-eight weeks, beginning in April and terminating in November; but some companies go South during the winter, and keep up their exhibitions throughout the year. The majority of managers, however, disband their troupes when cold weather comes, places their horses with some farmer where hay is cheap, and devote the winter to preparations for the next summer's campaign.

CIRCUS MANAGEMENT

The management of a complete traveling circus requires tact and business ability. Except in cities, circuses usually exhibit but one day in a place and as managers never intend to lose a day, but travel from fifteen to thirty miles, put up their tent, give two exhibitions, afternoon and night, and then pull down their canvas and pack it away in the wagons, with seats for two or three thousand people, and other appurtenances, all within twenty-four hours, it is evident that a thorough organization of the working force and a systematic method of proceeding is necessary in order to do so much work in so limited a space of time. All the arrangements for the exhibition are made two or three weeks in advance of the arrival of the show by agents who engage grounds, take out licenses, contract for the boarding of men and horses, &c., reducing every agreement, however trifling, to writing. These agents also supervise the bill posting, and advertise in the newspapers. A large circus usually has from six to ten men ahead of it as agents, bill-posters, and the like, and a great deal depends upon the manner in which these fulfill their duties.

CIRCUS ADVERTISING

Traveling circus companies are noted for the lavish use they make of printers' ink. A complete set of pictorial bill used by a single company will sometimes cover a boarding, or bill board, 12 feet high and 150 feet long, no two bills being alike. These are usually printed in very high colors, and often represent the most impracticable feats that it is possible for a high imaginative artist to conceive. Programmes are distributed in advance of the troupe in immense quantities, and the advertising columns of the local press are used extensively. Circus advertisements are frequently very comical. Managers are exceeding fond of seeing their exhibition advertised in high-flown language, and the men they employ to write up their shows generally pile up the superlatives without regard to expense, and drag in all the jaw-breaking words possible, whether they are appropriate to the subject, or, indeed, whether they have any meaning at all. Some very remarkable French occasionally finds place in circus bills; as, for instance, the announcement that a celebrated lady rider would "electrify the audience by appearing in her unparalleled coup d'état on her swift-coursing bare-backed charger." The public are indebted to circus literature for the common word "equestrienne," which is not English, certainly is not French, but which is simply-circus.

CIRCUS EXPENSES

The expenses of a first-class traveling circus are very great, running from \$600 to \$1,000 per day, according to circumstances. A large company will comprise from eighty to one hundred men, including performers, musicians, grooms and tent men, all of whom have boarded as well as paid for their services. There are also from eighty to one hundred horses to be provided with hay and oats, sometimes even more. The licenses in some States are enormous, there being first a United States license for each State visited, then a State license, next a county license, and finally a corporation license, in addition to which until the first of October last, the managers were obliged to pay a Government tax of two per cent on their

gross receipts whether they were making money or losing it. In some States no licenses are required except those of the United States, and of the corporation. In other respects the expenses of a circus vary greatly from day to day, according to the locality visited, in the rent of the ground, the cost of advertising, the rate of hotel bills, &c., so that no manager can tell precisely what his daily expenditures are until the end of the season, when he can strike a general average. Taking into consideration the expenses of wintering the deterioration of the live stock, the wear and tear of wagons and equipments, and interest of money invested, there are not any first-class companies that can really make



any great amount of money on an average receipt of \$1,000 per day. There are only a few first-class establishments in the country. The majority of the traveling circuses are run at a much less expense. But a small circus has to pay as much ground rent and as heavy a license as a big one, and it must be a small affair that can be run at an expenditure of less than \$500 per day.

HOW THE BUSINESS PAYS

The majority of those who undertake to make a fortune by running a circus, if they have not a heavy capital to back their enterprise, after more or less years of toil and anxiety close their career through the intervention of the Sheriff. One enterprising manager in the West has been sold out every fall for the last twelve or fourteen years; but, with indomitable energy, he has appeared every spring on the road with a new monied partner and a new show. Perhaps his perseverance will be rewarded in the end. The circus business is very uncertain, as it may be affected by contingencies which the shrewdest manager cannot foresee, such as the weather, competition, and other influences of great importance. But companies with sufficient means to stand a succession of heavy losses usually make large profits in the long run, if managed with prudence and skill. And sometimes adventurous individuals starting into circus management head over

heels in debt, by a lucky stroke of fortune do a splendid business for a whole season or succession of seasons, while more attractive exhibitions, managed by shrewd and experienced showmen, are sinking money from one month's end to another. There are at least three American circus managers who are worth over a million dollars each, but these have made large portions of their fortunes through outside investments. There are other circus proprietors who are wealthy, but if every circus in the country should close up its affairs tomorrow, probably not one-half of them would be able to pay their debts.

CIRCUS ROWS AND RIOTS

Twenty years ago the papers were filled every summer with accounts of disturbances occurring at circus performances, often attended with loss of life. It was a common practice with country roughs to make up a party and attack the showmen, merely for the fun of a free fight; but of late that species of amusement has become unpopular, and now circuses seldom have any difficulties of this kind while exhibiting in the Northern States.

FOUR CIRCUS PROPRIETORS SHOT IN FIFTEEN MONTHS

In the South, however, the circuses have had a stormy time for the last few years—ever since the rebellion, in fact, and matters are worse now than ever before so far as getting a company thro' the country peaceably is concerned. In a little more than a year no less than four circus proprietors have been shot and killed in the Southern States, three of whom have met their deaths within the last few weeks. Mr. Wm. Lake, proprietor of Lake's Circus, a Cincinnati concern, was killed Aug. 21, 1869, at Granby, Mo., by a noted desperado, who escaped, but was subsequently arrested. Mr. Lake was one of the most quiet and inoffensive of men. C. T. Ames, proprietor of the Crescent City Circus, was shot at Dawson, Ga., on the 2d inst., and died in a few hours. While he was trying to quiet a disturbance, a party of three ruffians fired indiscriminately into the crowd, killing Mr. Ames and severely wounding a woman belonging to the sideshow. Ames circus was from New Orleans, but Mr. Ames was a native of Ohio. At Rayville, La., on the 4th inst., Mr. H. Whitby, one of the proprietors of Hemmings, Cooper & Whitby's circus, a Philadelphia company, was fatally shot; and within a day or two news has come of the shooting of still another circus manager, a Mr. J. W. Robinson, from Illinois, who was shot near Little Rock, Ark. How many employees of circuses have been killed within the last year in the South it is impossible to say, but the last issue of the *New York Clipper* reports the slaughter of five in a single week. The ruffians who perpetuate these outrages do not always have it entirely their own way, however, for some circuses traveling in the South have all their men armed to the teeth. With such companies, when a man undertakes to pass into the show on the strength of a revolver, a bullet

is sent crashing through his skull.

WHAT BECOMES OF CIRCUS RIDERS

It is popularly supposed that circus riders and gymnasts are a very short lived people, but it is not so. The notion probably originated from the fact that the performers whom people see are nearly always young or middle, but a gray-headed athlete doing ground and lofty tumbling would hardly be an attractive sight, and therefore performers generally retire from the arena as age comes upon them, even though they may retain a good share of the pristine activity. There are exceptions to this rule, however, as in the case of Jos. Pentland, who was playing clown when the oldest inhabitant was learning his a-b-cs, but is as active now as ever, and Mr. S. P. Stickney, the veteran ringmaster, both well known to New Yorkers. Mr. Stickney was many years an enterprising and successful manager, and his name was familiar to circus goers in all parts of the Union. He is now as straight as an arrow, does not dye his hair, and would readily pass for forty-five. How old he really is may be inferred from

A LITTLE STORY

that is told of him. It is said that a few years ago Mr. Stickney engaged in conversation with the landlord of a hotel where the company with which he was traveling was stopping. Circus performances in general formed the topic under discussion, and it was one in which the innkeeper took interest. Boniface was an old white-headed personage, apparently seventy years of age, and though he was aware that Mr. Stickney was attached to the circus, he did not know who he was. After speaking very favorable of the entertainment that he had witnessed that day, the old gentleman concluded his conversation by innocently saying to Mr. S.:

"I tell you what it is, young man, there is no use in talking; we never see such circuses now-a-days as we had when I was a boy and old Stickney was alive."

A CIRCUS RIDER'S CHIEF AMBITION

is to have a circus of his own. Next after that, the longing of his heart is for a nice, well-stocked farm. Westchester and Putnam counties are full of retired showmen, nearly all of whom are easy in their circumstances, and some of whom are wealthy. Among these may be found gray and grizzled farmers, who twenty-five and thirty years ago were wont to appear before admiring multitudes, in all the glory of tights and tinsel, as gay and dashing athletes. Many performers invest their savings in farms, as a provision for old age, long

before they think of retiring from the ring. Of those who essay management, some are successful, while more lose all they embark in such a venture. Two of the wealthiest circus proprietors in the world, both Americans, began life as apprentices to the business, and have worked their way up without the aid of backers, while there are many



performers who have accumulated a competence from the interests they have acquired in successful companies. Among the performers who appear in this city every winter are men who own valuable houses and city lots, and have fat bank accounts. Of course, there are many who are not so fortunate; but these, when age incapacitates them for the exercise of their profession, usually find employment about a show in some business capacity, or drift into some other occupation that will afford them a comfortable livelihood, unless they have children who are able and willing to provide for their wants.

A CONTRAST

The equestrian profession, as the circus people term their fraternity, is a little world within itself, and its members are as much exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune as the inhabitants of the greater world without. Twenty years ago, or thereabouts, there were two circus riders who were popular with the frequenters of the Old Bowery Amphitheater, one for the extraordinary manner in which he would spread himself over four horses at once, and the other for the artistic and spirited style in which he used to illustrate the noble Sioux warriors' peculiar method of hunting a stuffed coon with a stuffed club, and the cheerful shrillness with which he was wont to utter the defiant war-whoop. Today the first sports diamonds that will out-dazzle those of a first-class Tammany politician, owns valuable real estate and bank stock, and has no end of Government bonds, while the quondam representative of aboriginal habits and customs is a jolly car-starter who may be seen in all weather near the City Hall, plainly though comfortably clad, but wearing no nearer approach to jewelry than a pewter whistle, suspended from a buttonhole by a piece of twine. After all, however, there is no certainty that the honest car-starter is not the more contented and altogether the happiest man of the two.

Barnum newspaper ad used in 1871.
Pfening Archives.

The following is the New York Times's review of the first-ever performance of the P.T. Barnum Circus, the great enterprise organized by W.C. Coup, Dan Castello, and the great man himself. Today's Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth began at this moment.

Barnum's Museum, Menagerie and Circus, *New York Times*, New York, New York, 11 April 1871, p. 5.

Brooklyn can congratulate herself on having witnessed the earliest exhibition of Mr. Barnum's Combination, Museum, Menagerie and Circus. This event occurred last evening. Mr. Barnum's title to the exhibition, though cleverly chosen, fails only because our meagre English has no word comprehensive

enough to embrace in all its completeness the immense number of wonderful things massed in this single entertainment. Can a public be satisfied with only eleven camels? Perhaps not; but when we add that Mr. Barnum's marvels include a baby camel only six weeks old, we fancy the most exacting will find no ground for complaint. An ordinary menagerie, too, prides itself on a single specimen of the lion. Mr. Barnum has four, one of them the largest ever put into a cage. He introduces the spectator to zebras, elephants, gnus, yaks, elands; to a rhinoceros and leopards, (tawny and black); to kangaroos and white deer; to strange African boars, impossible birds and monkeys by the dozen; to two distinct happy families, composed of the most incongruous elements—in fact to all Noah's ark at one and the same time. There is no giraffe; not because Mr. Barnum did not secure one, but because the animal died on ship-board six weeks ago. Mr. Barnum informed the writer of this misfortune—and also of the fact that at the same time he lost a zebra and other animals—with the sang-froid with which one might detail to an unsympathetic friend, the loss of a coop of chickens. "The ship made a terribly long voyage. The men were out of fresh provisions. So they had to kill for me \$30,000 worth of giraffes and zebras to feed my lions on. But it's all right. I have telegraphed for another giraffe; he is now on his way, and will be here before long." There is something stupendous in the idea of telegraphing for giraffes. What is there besides this the reader may ask. A perfect avalanche of curiosities. As the exhibition place is entered, the visitor barely perceives an infinitesimal speck until it takes its hat off and is proven a dwarf, about a foot high. Presently a deep shadow falls, and lifting up the eye, a giant towers above the stranger like a Lombardy poplar. The sight-seeker turns about for refuge, and finds himself in tete-a-tete with a whiskered and mustachioed girl, or an armless lady. Then giving everything up, lost in bewilderment, he wanders about quite dazed amid Egyptian mummies, and in the presence of Gen. Moltke, the Siamese twins, King William, the Cardiff giant, a sleeping woman, Louis Napoleon, a perpetual motion machine, an expiring Zouave, and a trumpet player, until with a brain in an utter state of chaos, repose is sought of in a mitrailleuse freshly captured at Sedan. Is this not enough? Yet is there more. The crack of the whip is heard and the merry laugh of the clown. The cheers of the people come forth, and, peering over the heads of fully 3000 people, one can see

the graceful circus performers executing elegant acts. One appreciates with difficulty that all these features belong to one and the same exhibition. What else, however, is to be expected of an impresario having 100 vans,

250 horses, 175 teamsters, and sixty performers, and who, not contented with all the animals and rarities on exhibition, declares it to be his intention to add still more wondrous traits to it, and apologizes because he has not yet gotten the unicorn or the flying dragon? Mr. P. T. Barnum's combination is wonderful for its completeness, and is, perhaps, the largest exhibition of this nature ever before brought together in the annals of the show business.

Shake-downs by city officials are nothing new in circusdom as these two reports from the Brooklyn Eagle document. In this case, Brooklyn's grafting political minions sought retribution after Howe's Great London declined to lavish the usual free passes on local political hacks. A violent confrontation between the circus and the police almost resulted over the lack of a permit to cross a sidewalk, thus stranding the circus, until enterprising managers finally obtained one at the third city official's house they visited. The second article is about spin control. It is as instructive about the workings of 19th century machine politics as it is about circus history.

The City Officials and the Showmen A Free Fight Nearly Growing Out of the Omission of Free Tickets, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 1 May 1871, p. 10.

There is trouble between the circus exhibitors and showmen and the holders of city offices generally, from policemen upwards. Stated in a nutshell, the fact is that the showmen used to give the officeholders free tickets to the circus, and the circuses were charged no license fee for performing in Brooklyn. The other day the Aldermen, for the first time, ordered the shows to pay a license fee of from \$100 to \$200, and the show resolved to retaliate by cutting off the official dead-heads from their free-list. Whereupon the officials appear to have resolved to worry the showmen into conceding the free tickets, and out of this resolve there came near being a fight between the showmen and the police the other evening at Greenpoint.

Just here is may be mentioned that the moment the Aldermen imposed a license fee upon the shows, the owners of the lots where the shows exhibited raised their rents also. Formerly the owner of the Fulton avenue ground charged three hundred dollars a week; Barnum had to pay four hundred dollars a week; in future the rent is to be five hundred dollars a week. This ground is admirably located for drawing a crowd, and there is no other now to be had. The show yard where the circus tents are erected is an old grave yard—it is said a few bodies of the long since dead are still lying there. The building on the lots, formerly a Church where the eloquence of Mr. Bartlett resounded, is now a theatre under the designation of Donnelly's Olympic; and the parsonage alongside is now a liquor saloon.

The show that had appeared at Greenpoint was

"Howe's London Circus." It had an engagement for the next night at Flushing, and was bound to pull up stakes and move at midnight after the Greenpoint people had retired to bed. The license fee of \$100 had been duly paid at the City Hall, with no notice then given that any further document was required. During the progress of the evening's entertainment the police Captain of the Precinct served upon the showmen a copy of the following document which he had just received from the City Hall:

"April 24, 1871, Captain Rhodes: You will prevent circus companies or other parties from crossing the sidewalk in your Precinct, without a permit from this department. Robert Furey, Street Commissioner. Per Chas. B. Wylie, Chief Clerk."

The circus men were nonplussed at this notice. They said, we have crossed the sidewalk and are encamped on the lots. As soon as the performance is over we must move off and start for the Island to fulfill our other engagements. Delay until we can get a "permit" to-morrow will throw us out of our programme of engagements, and cost us a thousand dol-

lars or more. They then went to the police station and telegraphed to the headquarters of police, asking to be allowed to leave, and offering bail for any damage that might be done to the sidewalk by their vans. The answer came quick and sharp that the police must enforce the Street Commissioner's order, unless he repealed it.

Next the circus men started for the Mayor's mansion, that being the nearest residence of any city official. The Mayor with commendable prudence let them ring away at his doorbell until they were tired, with no response but the echoes ringing along the broad corridors and stairways of the spacious domicile. It was now long past midnight. The circus men next drove from the Mayor's to the Street Commissioner's house, and there also rang in vain, the Commissioner and his household sleeping too soundly to be awakened; next they started for the Deputy Street Commissioner, Mr. McCauley, and luckily finding him not retired to rest, obtained at once a permit enabling them to cross the sidewalk and depart in peace.

Meanwhile, the circus employees had been busily prosecuting their preparations for departure, and had resolved to go when they got ready, with a permit, if possible, but without one, if they must. The few police on hand did not relish the idea of a fight with fifty circus drivers and horse tenders, and sent for reinforcements. These were obtained, embodied and marched to the spot, but by the time they arrived the permit had arrived also, and the last wagon, under the sheltering aegis of Deputy McCauley's signed manual, was in the act of crossing the sidewalk.

The city ordinances very properly forbid wheeled vehicles to cross the sidewalks without a permit from the



Street Commissioner. The object of this is to make the parties pay for any breaking of flagstones that may occur. Before the license fee was saddled on the circuses, they always applied for and got the sidewalk permit. But now they hold that the license covers and includes the permit, and the city officials insist that it does not, but that a special permit is still needed. The sensible plan would be for the license to be issued specifically on condition of the permit being first duly had and obtained. But the real cause of the whole dispute is probably the cutting off of the usual free tickets, consequent on the city imposing on them the new requirement of a license fee. The circus men say they would rather pay a license fee than issue free tickets to the officials as the latter are not content with admission for themselves, or even for their families also, but want enough tickets to admit all their acquaintances. The circus above mentioned was "struck" by a single policeman, for no less than twenty-five tickets; which were refused.

The circus men complain of the police for not accepting security when offered, for payment of the damage, if any, done to the sidewalk. They appealed to the Mayor and Commissioner Briggs to know if the police at headquarters ought not, under the circumstances, to have taken a money bond and let the circus go, instead of trying to hold it over to the next day, at a loss of \$1000 or more, merely for the formality of getting a permit to cross the sidewalk. They claim the Commissioners took this view and dissented from the action of their subordinates in the matter.

The New York license fee for circus shows is \$250; that of Brooklyn \$100 to \$300, in the discretion of the authorities. The circus men say they are ready to pay money, or give tickets, but not both; to take out a license or a Street Commissioner's permit, but not both. As the same circus is coming to Brooklyn next week, further developments may result.

Circuses and Sidewalks The Trouble in the Eastern District—Howe's Circus to be Sued for Injuring the Sidewalk on Fulton Avenue. The Brooklyn Eagle, Brooklyn, New York, 2 May 1871, p. 4.

On inquiry of Street Commissioner Furey, to-day, in relation to the emanation of an order from his office, for preventing a circus company from leaving a lot upon which they had been performing, in the Eastern District, (as reported in the Eagle on Saturday) by prohibiting the Company from taking its wagons across the sidewalk, it appears that the order was issued by a clerk, under a misapprehension of the circumstances of the case.

Mr. Furey also states that he would have revoked the order at once, had he known of it, and calls attention to the fact that it was promptly countermanded by Deputy Street Commissioner McCauley, as soon as it came to his knowledge. Mr. Furey further adds, that he never accepts complimentary passes or tickets of any kind whatever,

and that when any are sent to him, as is frequently the case, he invariably returns them unused.

By the City Ordinance, all parties desirous of crossing the sidewalks with vehicles of any description, are required to procure a permit from the office of the Street Commissioner.

In cases where the permit is sought by a circus company it is duly stated in the permit, and Mr. Furey states that the requiring of circus companies to take out licenses does not relieve them of the necessity for obtaining permits for crossing the sidewalks. He declares his intention to hold all circus companies or others crossing the sidewalks with vehicles, strictly responsible for any damage to the walks that may result, and to this end is about to proceed against Howe's European Circus and Menagerie, which entered the city to-day, and in crossing the sidewalk on Fulton avenue without a permit, injured the curb and flagging.

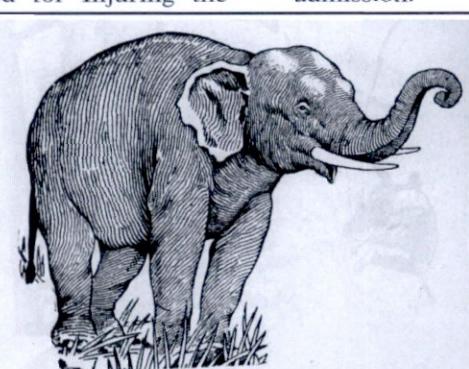
The slow, almost imperceptible, transformation of the circus from entertainment primary for adults to one for children, particularly boys, was one of the most profound and complex changes in the institution's history. This process accelerated in the 1870s, continuing for over a century until the reintroduction of adult-oriented circuses such as Big Apple and Cirque du Soleil in the 1980s. Evidence of this shift is found in the following remarks which stress the appeal of the circus to kids and its centrality in their lives.

The Titusville Morning Herald, Titusville, Pennsylvania, 5 May 1871, p. 3.

When the circus comes to town, it is always a day of jubilee for young folks.

The Pittsfield Sun, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 18 May 1871, p. 2.

The boys in country towns are anticipating the arrival of the circus, and are laying in a stock of old junk and iron, in order to raise the necessary dimes to procure admission.



The Cedar Rapids Times, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 26 April 1877, p. 3.

The leading question among the juveniles now is, when will the first circus put in an appearance?

Butte Miner, Butte, Montana, 8 May 1877, p. 1.

A penniless boy will follow a traveling ice cream establishment further than any other earthly thing except a circus band wagon.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

Iowa State Reporter, Waterloo, Iowa, 9 May 1877, p. 3.

The saddest moment of a boy's life is when the circus music strikes up and he hasn't any ticket to go in.

Burlington Hawk-Eye, Burlington, Iowa, 10 May 1877, p. 1.

The ten-year old boy that won't sell his mother's three dollar brass kettle for enough money to purchase a twen-

ty-five cent circus ticket, either lacks courage and experience or has no taste for high-toned amusements.—*Norristown Herald*.

The *Titusville Morning Herald*, Titusville, Pennsylvania, 1 June 1877, p. 3.

Now the gentle youth draggeth the sawhorse and six tubs into the back yard and with his gamesome companions beginneth to practice gymnastics. He leapeth joyously over the sawhorse, standeth upon his close-cropped head upon the tubs, each in succession, while his companions turn cart-wheels over the flower-beds. All of which sheweth that the circus has been here. And yet we hear of no rise in the price of [?] or sticking-plaster.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 June 1879, p. 4.

The small boys are already around looking up jobs in order to raise a sufficient number of nickels to gain admittance to the circus. Dealers in Fourth of July ammunition will be obliged to reduce prices on their articles in order to dispose of them, as the circus and Fourth follow too closely in order to allow the urchins a chance to make the second raise.

Country people were another group to which the circus had special appeal. Newspapers frequently noted it, usually mentioning the farmer's isolation and lack of other entertainment. Rustics often made a day of it, shopping in the morning, attending the circus in the afternoon, then heading back as far as thirty miles, a vast distance by horsepower. The Rosston, Springer and Henderson Circus was the object of the countryman's affection in the first article. The third piece gives a rather tongue-in-cheek description of the importance of circus day for rural folks.

Amusement—the Menagerie, *The Elyria Independent Democrat*, Elyria, Ohio, 17 May 1871, p. 3.

Those who live in towns and cities where there is scarcely a day when there is not something on the tapis [?] that tends to relieve the tedium of the common routine of life, often complain of the dearth of amusements. They have lectures, concerts, theaters and all kinds of shows, both moral and vulgar, and yet they pine for amusements. What do such persons think of those who live in the Country—whose only opportunity for amusement is the winter evening sociable at a neighbors fire-side, or the Circus and Menagerie which they can only visit by going many miles? There are hundreds who have no other opportunities for amusement, and who blames them for spending a little money once or twice a year in taking their families to the Circus or Menagerie? To them the performances of the Clown and feats of the Acrobats are a source of real enjoyment; and who would deprive them of it?

The Circus and Menagerie which is to exhibit here next Monday, will afford an opportunity to gratify the desires of hundreds of amusement seekers, and will doubtless call out a large crowd to see the performances of the Arabs, and the cages of wild animals.

Daily Nevada State Journal, Reno, Nevada, 21 June 1877, p. 3.

There ought to be lots of folks in from the country tomorrow. A circus generally draws like a plaster.

The Circus, *The Freeborn County Standard*, Albert Lea, Minnesota, 6 June 1878, p. 4.

To dwellers in the cities, where amusements are at a discount, and the trouble lies in deciding what show to patronize, the advent of a circus troupe occasions little comment and no excitement. People grumble at having the dead walls defaced with the staring bills and posters emblazoned with representations of the human form dancing on nothing, and upside down at that; they smile over the spectacle, on paper, of M'ddle. La Something or other riding six horses all at the same time, with only two legs and one body to do it with—but they don't think of going to see how it is done—that is, the more respectable portion of them.

In the country it is different.

When a community of people is at such a low ebb in the way of amusements as to find a walk to the grave yard, Sunday afternoon, exhilarating, and a funeral in the meeting-house a diversion, of course a circus is something to be talked about.

The village paper prints a glowing advertisement, embellished with engravings of the wonderful chariot, drawn by ten white horses; and then there are the dancing bears, and the elephants and the monkeys. And everybody has a lurking curiosity to see monkeys—perhaps

because there is a Darwinian streak in them, and they long to know something of their illustrious ancestry.

For three weeks before the coming of the circus the county boys and girls do without their sticks of candy "when father goes to the store," and save up their pennies to pay their fare into the circus. "Admittance fifty cents; children under twelve years, half price," so reads the circular.

About that time all the boys and girls are under twelve years. It will be a rare thing to find any children or young people over that age. The old folks think fifty cents "awful high to see one of these kicking up shows," and they talk it over among themselves, and decide that "as Mary Ann is small of her age, which is fifteen, and as Thomas ain't very stout-built for a boy of eighteen," they guess they'll try to get 'em in for half price. Thomas can scrooch a little and Mary Ann don't look more'n ten, with her hair braided and banging down her back.

Good honest souls, who wouldn't be seen putting a counterfeit nickel on the plate on Sunday, will argue this, and teach their children lessons in deception—but it is a circus, and a quarter is all it is worth.



A few people there are who consider circuses immoral, and such close their blinds on circus days, but can generally be found peeping out through the slats at the procession, though they would stoutly deny the fact if questioned.

Every girl has to have a new dress for the circus. She also must have her hat smartened up a little, for all the beaus will be there, and ready to "treat" the best-looking girls to peanuts and lemonade, and perhaps take them into see the side show.

The circus affords a splendid opportunity for devoted swarms to escort their lady-loves abroad; and you will see them by the dozen, in their long-tailed coats, and well-oiled hair, carrying an umbrella in one hand, and supporting their heart's adored on the other arm. And if very devoted and, strictly speaking, "meaning business," the faithful swain will load her down with bags of candy and peanuts, and a Japanese fan, and the poor, blushing, happy young thing will stagger along under these burdens of affection, and if anybody steps on her trail she is helpless till her admirer swears at him, and wants to know "if he can't keep them two-houses of his off from a lady's dress?"

Well, let the circus flourish, and the trapeze find favor—everything has its advantages, and a circus is the best place in the world to pass bogus currency.

One of the highlights of the 1871 circus season was the importation of ten Asian elephants from Ceylon by James E. Kelly, part owner and financial mastermind of the Van Amburgh Menagerie and the Howe's Great London Circus. Two of the animals, later named Mandarin and Hebe, in 1880 produced the first elephant calf born in the Western world since Roman times. The New York Times gave the immigrants lots of ink.

New York Times, New York, New York, 21 July 1871, p. 8.

The bark Nehemiah Gibson, which we announced about a month ago as being on the way to New York with eleven elephants on board, arrived yesterday. The Gibson left Colombo, Ceylon, on March 20, and has had pleasant weather the entire passage, with the exception of three severe gales off the Cape of Good Hope. The elephants bore their long and tedious confinement remarkably well, only one having died on the passage. They are in charge of Mr. Channon and three natives. Mrs. George W. Prescott, wife of the United States Consul at Ceylon, came home on the Gibson.

The Newly-Arrived Elephants, New York Times, New York, New York, 22 July 1871, p. 8.

The bark Nehemiah Gibson, as reported in the Times yesterday, which arrived yesterday from Ceylon, and is now lying in the river, off the Battery, has on board ten elephants, one of them a young one, which have been brought over here for Howe's circus. These elephants

were brought over here from the island of Manaair, north of Ceylon, by the agent, Mr. H. Channon, who purchased them and superintended their shipment. The animals were got in Baticolao, Hambertol, Trincomalee and Saffragan. Four months were occupied in securing them, and three months more in bringing them here. One of the elephants was lost on the passage. They will be shackled and led by their keepers through the streets today for transportation to Canada, where the circus company is now performing.

East Indian Visitors, New York Times, New York, New York, 23 July 1871, p. 5.

The traditional countryman who comes to New York solely for the purpose of "seeing the elephant" by following in the track of a Times reporter, yesterday, could have seen ten of the animals. He could not have been treated to the spectacle, however, unless he was willing and prepared to go to considerable lengths to find them.

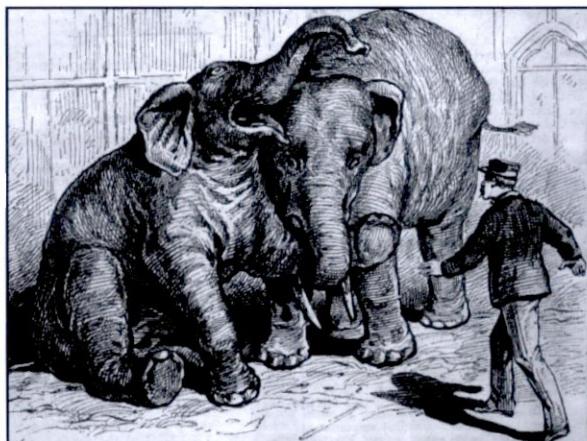
An elephant-hunt in the wilds of Africa or the jungles of India is a sport that calls for a display of considerable courage. It is a novel amusement in New York; and though the one yesterday was not attended with much personal risk, it nevertheless demanded a large amount of perseverance, and some extraordinary feats of pedestrianism, to discover the whereabouts of the huge beasts whose appearance in this City threatened to create a sensation.

After a journey from the Battery to Sixty-first-street, and from Brooklyn to Hoboken, the beasts were finally found at the foot of Thirteenth-street, North River, on board the bark Nehemiah Gibson, Capt. Smalley, which

arrived at this port after a four months' voyage from Ceylon. An interesting concourse of the denizens of the Sixteenth Ward, principally composed of mischievous small boys, was on the dock with eyes opened wide and mouths agape with expectation, while Capt. Smalley was giving orders to his sailors. In talking with Capt. Smalley about the elephants, he furnished the following account of the trade in those beasts in the east Indies: "If you want to buy elephants cheap in Ceylon," said the Captain, "you

must go to your hotel, throw yourself back in a chair, stick your thumbs in your vest, and say I want to buy some elephants. The native dealers will seek you out eagerly and tell you yarns about the fine beasts they have on hand for your consideration. Stroke your chin musingly and tell them to fetch along the elephants for inspection, and they will do it. If you want one, you will be shown a hundred. The elephants aboard my vessel, however, were bargained for at the jungle. They are all fine beasts and no mistake. They were all trapped in the jungles of the Mannah District in Ceylon, and all of them, with one exception, a chap of thirty years of age, were fresh caught and wild. The one referred to had been about two years in the custody of the native dealers."

THE VOYAGE TO NEW YORK



"We received the elephants at Colombo (Ceylon) and the beasts were got on board by means of canvas slings and ropes and pulleys hung from the rigging and main-sail boom. Eleven of them in all were safely stowed between decks. Forty five natives were employed in the work of hoisting and lowering them aboard ship. This number was more than was needed, but labor is cheap in Ceylon, and I thought I might as well have enough of them while I was about it. Everybody said 'Smalley, you'll never get those elephants safe to New York carrying them between decks, they haven't got enough head room, they'll die certain.' You see it had been customary, heretofore, to carry them in the hold. I said to them all. 'You just let me alone. I know what I am about,' and here they are today all but the one who died on the passage. I made good preparation for them; I had stalls built of teak wood, strong enough on all sides to resist a pressure of 2,000 pounds and so constructed as to keep each animal in his place and securely separated from the others in the roughest weather. We sailed on the 20th March, and experienced the best kind of weather until we reached the Cape of Good Hope. We had some little trouble and anxiety about the elephants. Most of them got sea-sick, which was manifested in their refusing either to eat or drink for several days, but they soon got over their qualmishness and were able to eat as hearty as when on dry land.

"At the Cape of Good Hope we began to have rough weather. We had three terrific gales while rounding the Cape, and the rough weather continued from the 14th to the 22nd of May. We all felt a great deal of anxiety about the elephants, who sometimes set up a fearful roaring, but luckily the bark weathered the gales successfully, and the elephants, thanks to the excellent precautions taken to fasten them securely in their stalls, came through it uninjured. As I showed you when below, there were the two iron ring-bolts driven and riveted into the sides of the vessel, and the strong bar of teak wood well lashed to the front of the stalls.

"Well, Sir, in rough weather we used to tie their hind legs to the ring bolts, and the beasts would themselves wrap their trunks around the wooden bar before them and hold fast, and in this position the waves might toss the vessel as much as they pleased but they couldn't throw the elephants off their feet. Sometimes, to be sure, an extraordinary lurch to one side or the other of the craft would throw the elephants' backs up against the deck overhead, but this didn't happen often enough to give them much annoyance. We put in at St. Helena to take in a fresh supply of water, and to get some green feed for the beasts. We took in

5,000 gallons of water there, and treated the elephants to a feast of green grass, which they eat with a hearty relish, and showed in their elephantine fashion the liveliest gratitude to those who fed them. They used 26,000 gallons of water on the passage, and eat up 125 bales of hay, averaging 275 pounds per day, which food was in addition to two bushels of gramm and paddy, the last rolled up in the form of little balls or cakes, and fed to them from the hands of their Singhalese keepers. Every individual on board would occasionally give them a sea-biscuit, which was esteemed by the elephants to be a great luxury. We selected names for some of the elephants on the voyage, which I suppose they will always retain. One of them was known as Mandoy. This animal was the king elephant of the whole crew of them. He belongs to what the natives call high caste, and all the other beasts were afraid of him. He was, without doubt, with the exception of another high caste elephant that was my favorite, and whom I called Nehemiah Gibson, the most knowing creature in the whole lot. Mandoy was everybody's favorite, and I believe he will make his mark in the States. Another one that we called the Rajah was the largest animal among them, and weighs 2,000 pounds. Then there was the baby elephant, only eight years old and weighing 800 pounds. The elephant that died on the passage had everything done to save him that was possible, but nothing would avail.

"Channon said that his disease was dropsy. The other elephants, I really believe, were conscious and felt sorrow for his death. When we were hauling him up on deck to throw him overboard, Mandoy, the elephant I told you about, threw his trunk around the hind legs of the dead beast, in the same caressing manner that I had observed them do when they wished to show friendship."

The arrangements for hoisting the animals from the bark to the pier, yesterday, were ropes and pulleys fastened in the rigging, and canvas slings. There was no trouble in landing the first three. The fourth one was the elephant called Mandoy. This brute became quite unruly before the sling was fixed, and roared and threw his trunk about in a rage. The men handling him became frightened and the Captain went below and finally succeeded in pacifying him. He was finally trapped, and as he was hauled up and suspended in the air he flapped his big ears, worked his huge legs, and threw his trunk around wildly. When he landed on the pier he showed some signs of rage at the jeering crowd who were looking on, and at the same time the three elephants, already landed, broke from their fastening to a post on the pier. The animals were all secured again, and were led off toward the depot under the charge of Mr. Channon. As they were going down the pier, the elephants started on a run, and the crowd scampered in all directions. The elephants were soon got under control again, but the crowd on the pier were more cautious of a close approach to those afterward landed.

*The Ceylonese, New York Times, New York, New York,
24 July 1871, p. 3.*

The ten elephants which were landed from the bark Nehemiah Gibson, at the foot of Thirtieth-street, North River, on Saturday, a full description of which was given

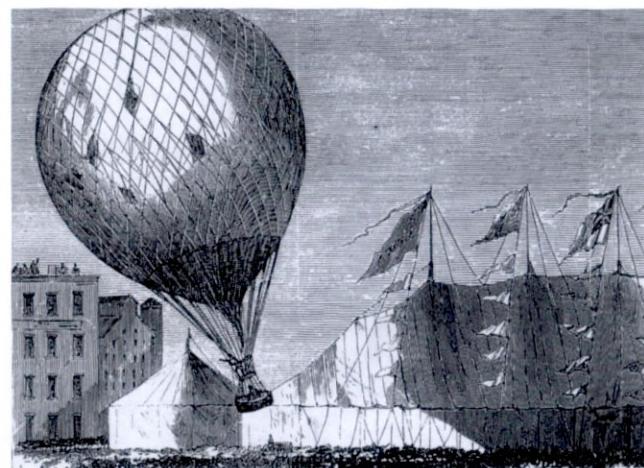


in yesterday's Times, were lodged for the night in a yard in Eleventh-avenue in connection with the stables of the Hudson River Railroad. Here they were visited by the greater portion of the population of the surrounding neighborhood, and up to a late hour on Saturday night, and as soon as it was daylight on Sunday morning the whole vicinity seemed to be flocking to see these monster animals. Those who could not gain access to the yard by legitimate means climbed over the tops and walls of the shanties around, while others strained their eyes through cracks or holes of the boarded fence of the yard in order to get a glimpse of the visitors. Some of the sight-seers seemed as anxious to see the Singhalese keepers as they were to view the elephants. The Oriental costume of these men, the odd sounds they uttered to call each other, or to make their charge obey them, all added to the wonderment of the crowd. These men are Mohammedans, and it is quite an undertaking to provide food for them, as they will not eat any animal food unless they kill it themselves. They have lately been fed on curried fish, and at times fowl, which they eat with a great relish. About 9 o'clock it was made known that the animals would leave their quarters for the depot of the Hudson River Railroad Company, between Ninth and Tenth avenues. The crowd around the yard soon increased; the men and boys rushed from their domiciles only partly dressed; women with babes in their arms and small tribes of children dragging to their skirts, came running from all directions.

Soon the large gates were thrown open, and there was a general rush to get out of the way. Boys in their hurry tumbled one over the other, while men and women were splashed from head to foot with the mud from the pools which abound in this neighborhood. All mishaps seemed to be taken in good part; all had come with a determination to see the elephant, come what might. The distance to the depot was soon accomplished. Five large produce cars were drawn up for their reception near the passenger's platform, which were surrounded by a number of employees of the Company, and a few favored outsiders who gained admission at the entrance gate. Meanwhile the crowd remained outside on the tops of cars, wagons, carts, houses and every available object where they could get another glimpse. Opinions as to the probable age of the animals, their strength, &c., were freely passed, and it was most amusing to listen to the various stories which were told to the children by their elders of the habits of these animals. One individual, who was inside the enclosure, and who held two timid little girls by the hand, was vainly endeavoring to convince them that the "elephants were as 'armless as lambs,'" when the baby elephant scampered toward him. His courage instantly failed. He took the two girls up sharply, one under each arm, and decamped for several yards as fast as his legs would carry him.

The arrangements for moving the animals from the platform to the cars were very simple. Strong planks were laid down from the platform to the cars, and the cars being only a few inches higher than the platform, the incline they had to ascend was very slight. Two were placed in each car, and there was very little trouble in getting the first four couples into the four cars. The remaining couple consisted of the baby elephant, and the largest

one in the troupe, called Rajah. After some little difficulty the baby was got in, but Rajah seemed determined not to enter his new domicile. He roared and threw himself about when it was attempted to pull and push him in by force. He would not stir an inch. Presently he made a sudden dart in the opposite direction to which he was wanted to go, dragging the Singhalese and others who were holding the rope with him. He had not proceeded far before two of the keepers managed to get before him, and with the aid of their spears stopped him. He was brought back, and reached the door of the car, when he suddenly turned round and repeated his previous maneuver. Again



he was brought back, but blows from the sticks and spears could not make the unruly and obstinate brute enter the cars. At last Capt. Smalley suggested that the baby should be brought out of the car again, with the idea that when Rajah saw it come out and re-enter he would follow it. After a little coaxing and a sop of sponge cake and sugar-candy the Captain's idea had the desired effect. Slowly feeling every inch of his way, and not moving more than one inch at a time, Rajah at least walked into the car. No sooner had this feat been accomplished than trusses of hay and barrels of water were placed in each car, the barrels being screwed to the sides and bottoms. The Superintendent of the line also ordered a carpenter to bore several holes in each car two inches in diameter, in order to give the animals plenty of air. A baggage and passenger car was furnished for the keepers and others, and soon after they were loaded a powerful engine was attached and the train started off on its special journey. The crowd anxiously watched till nothing could be seen but the smoke from the engine and the cloud of dust that surrounded the cars, and nothing heard but the distant rumbling of the wheels, and an occasional ding-dong from the bell.

Hot-air balloon ascensions were extremely popular and extremely dangerous in the 1870s. Any number of "aeronauts," as they were called, bought the farm when their balloons unexpectedly crashed back to earth. Others, such as the unfortunate Professor Torres, drowned when their balloons came down over water. The most famous accident involving a hot-air balloon occurred on the Barnum's Hippodrome show in 1875 when Professor Washington Donaldson ascended over Chicago and then unexpectedly

went eastward into Lake Michigan, where he disappeared. This incident may have been L. Frank Baum's inspiration for making the Wizard of Oz a balloon ascensionist who went off course and over the rainbow.

A Sad Catastrophe, *The Independent*, Massillon, Ohio,
26 July 1871, p. 3.

Prof. Torres, the aeronaut attached to Grady's Circus, which exhibited here on Saturday last, came to his death in an entirely unlooked for and unexpected manner. At the close of the afternoon performance the balloon was inflated with hot air and smoke, and about six o'clock was cast loose from its moorings and rapidly ascended toward the clouds, with the professor dangling on his trapeze beneath, performing a series of astonishing and difficult gymnastic feats. After mounting to the height of several hundred feet, the balloon began to descend, and came down in the canal, a short distance south of the residence of Gen. Kent Jarvis. The professor having neglected to take a life-preserver with him, and being unable to swim, was drowned before assistance could reach him. Several persons who had gone down the road to see him land, witnessed the accident, and hastened to render their aid, but were too late to save his life. Drs. Reed, Ridenour and others, were summoned, who hurried to the place and did all that medical knowledge or human ingenuity could devise to restore him, but the vital spark had fled, never to return. Prof. Torres was apparently about 30 years of age, was a native of Spain, and seems to have been a general favorite with the company. His remains were buried on Sunday in the English Catholic cemetery, and were followed to their last resting place by the entire circus company as well as a large number of sympathizing citizens.

These enthusiastic reviews of Andrew Haight's Circus, Cooper and Bailey's, and Dan Rice's are typical of the period. Enthusiastic critics proclaimed far too many circuses the best ever to have been true in every case, leading jaded commentators to opine that the more newspaper advertising a circus placed, and the more free passes the editor received, the better the after-notice, suggesting that the show's press agent had a hand in writing such glowing appraisals, or at least encouraged the editor's use of such superlatives. Richard Conover stated that press agents occasionally wrote "after-blasts," leading him to distrust their value as sources. Unfortunately, he never cited an example, and neither Stuart Thayer nor Bill Slout, who between them have read more 19th century papers than the rest of us put together, have ever discovered a review that they supposed was placed by the circus. Perhaps the embellished rhetoric in assessments such as those following was what made Conover suspicious.

The comment about the monetary "night mare" in the

first citation refers to the lack of money in circulation, a chronic economic problem after the Civil War.

Georgia Weekly Telegraph, Macon, Georgia, 2 January 1872, p. 3.

Cuthbert, December 28, 1871. The Christmas holidays, in conjunction with Haight's Mammoth Circus and Menagerie, literally depopulated this and the surrounding counties, and threw such a mass of animated mortality upon the streets today, as the oldest inhabitant had never witnessed.

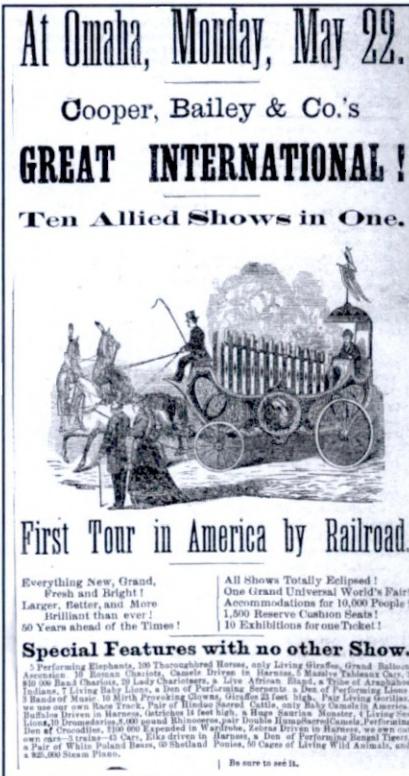
The immense canvas of the caravan could not accommodate one-half of the crowd which swarmed in every direction, and such a harvest of fractional currency was gathered in, as might have gone far towards relieving the monetary crises which presses like a night mare upon this community.

These exhibitions have been likened to a sweeping rain which leaves nothing behind it. But here is another view of the matter. In times of gloom and despondency, the people require amusement and relaxation to revive their drooping spirits and inspire new hope and energy for the future. A hearty laugh and a few hours of recreation are a wonderful panacea. If these shows could be stripped of the immoralities and gross allusions which usually attach to them, they would be comparatively harmless. All agree that Haight's was the best that ever performed in this city. His acrobats surpassed even the "Japs."

Cooper & Bailey ad used in 1876. Pfening Archives.

The Circus, *Salt Lake City Daily Tribune*, Salt Lake City, Utah, 26 August 1876, p. 4.

Cooper, Bailey & Co.'s great international show left town last night on its way west, and will exhibit in Corinne to-day. This monster entertainment has exhibited three days in Salt Lake (six performances), generally to crowded houses, and every time with hearty approval. And the success they have met with was fully deserved. The menagerie is unsurpassed. Seven elephants make an imposing display, the two lions and a lioness are noble representatives of the royal beast, and the two Bengal tigers are also magnificent specimens. The collection of living animals is fully equal to the promise held out, and an hour spent amongst them is full of interest and instruction. The amphitheatre is a no less interesting feature, and the feats of dexterity exhibited there border upon the marvelous. Acrobats who seem to defy the law of gravitation, and athletes who appear to transcend the possibilities of the human organism. Miss Polly Lee performs a number of marvelous feats on the "flying trapeze," and she is no less deserving of praise as an equestrienne. We have not space to enumerate all that is worthy of commendation; but in general terms, we may say that this show is the best and most attractive that has ever visited this city, and whatever the proprietors under-



take to do is done well done.

Dan Rice, *The Dubuque Herald*, Dubuque, Iowa, 15 July 1877, p. 4.

The two performances of Dan Rice's show in this city were not as well attended as they would have been, had the people known the real merit of the performance. To sum it up in a nut-shell, we unhesitatingly pronounce it the best circus performance that has been given in this city for years—in fact, the best ever given here. It is not only amusing, but instructive, and Mr. Rice deserves credit for the unostentatious manner in which he deals out his wares. The entertainment is not spread out on illuminated show bills, but is concentrated under the canvas—in the arena—where Dan himself delights the audience with his brilliant and witty intellect. There is nothing presented but what could, with propriety, be enacted in a church, without desecrating those sanctuaries; and it is a question requiring no argument to determine that the intelligence of his trained horses, in many respects, is superior to that of many ministers who rail against the wholesome amusement he furnishes the public. Dan Rice's show is worth the patronage of the public.

The apprenticeship system for training children in circus skills was alive and well in the 1870s. This article details the learning process child performers had to endure. It notes the cruelty visited upon apprentices by their masters was a thing of the past, making the astonishing assertion that once trainers notice that horses responded better to kindness than brutality, the method was successfully utilized in instructing children in the equestrian and gymnastic arts.

Children of the Sawdust. How Circus Apprentices are Treated and How They Are Taught Their Business, *New York Times*, New York, New York, 14 January 1872, p. 3.

Many of our readers, we fancy, have often seen and admired the pretty children whose graceful performances in the circus ring are always, to very many people, by far the most pleasing portion of the entertainment. There is, however, a popular belief that these children are cruelly treated to make them learn these various tricks, which some suppose to be hurtful to the infant frame. And this consideration, of course, detracts much from the pleasure that tender-hearted people would otherwise feel in witnessing the performances. The fact is that the things a child is taught to do in the ring are almost the same things that nine out of ten healthy children are continually doing on the greensward of the village commons, or on the carpeted floors of the parental parlors—or, best of all, in, on, over, under, and about the straw and



haystacks of the barnyard or on the sweet-scented clover that fills the "bay" in the huge old barn itself. Your own little boy,—dear, kind-hearted Madam, who gazes so pitifully at the little circus children—if he is a healthy and well-developed young chap, will stand on his head, with his boots in the air, or pitch himself head-over-heels a hundred times a day—thus keeping himself topsy-turvy half his waking hours—if only he has got some place where he can do it and not hurt himself. What your boy does is almost precisely what is done by the circus children, only they are taught to accomplish their feats in the most easy and graceful way.

The cruelty is a thing of the past, and the sufferings of gymnastic and equestrian apprentices of the present day are purely suppositions. In former times, however, things were very different; there is no doubt that years ago the horses and other trained animals exhibited in public were "broken" by the persistent use of the whip, and the performing children were taught their duties by the same amiable means. We have changed all that—the potency of the law of kindness and common sense in the breaking and training of horses was discovered by the circus peo-

ple themselves, and the worldwide propagation of the new method by Rarey and other masters of the art, thoroughly broke up the old one many years ago, both with professional equestrians, and with horse-lovers generally. It having been found that horses could be trained by kindness, it gradually dawned upon the child-whipping managerial mind that possibly human beings were amenable to the same general law, and that perhaps in their case kisses might prove more effective than curses. The experiment was tried—need it hardly be said—with complete success—and the noble horse having been rescued from the law of the lash, the emancipation of the children from the same dreaded monitor speedi-

ly follows.

The adult performers of the present day tell, however, some fearful stories of their early apprenticeship under the old system. James M. Nixon, a well-known circus manager, was apprenticed to old Turner, one of the old-fashioned rough school of managers, and father of Napoleon B. Turner, and other children who became distinguished in their profession. Nixon says he was seldom spoken to without both an oath and a blow, and that the lithe lash of the heavy wagon-whip cracked about his ears all day, from the time it woke him from his sleep in the all-too-early morning to the hour it sent him tingling and revengeful to his wretched bunk at night. William Dutton, lately playing at the Fourteenth-street Circus, who learned the business with Stokes, another of the

tyrant managers, tells the same story—nothing but blows, oaths and kicks from morning till night, to which was added also no inconsiderable amount of wholesome starvation.

The children of the ring are put into training as soon as they can fairly walk, though in these days it is not usual to see a boy of less than five or six years introduced in public in the acrobatic business. In the case of equestrians, however, the case is different—some ambitious riders bringing their offspring before the public much younger than this. For instance, little Alexander, the son of Melville, the Australian, has ridden in an act with his father since he was twenty months old, and he has never yet met with an accident more serious than happens to any boy who “stubs his toe” against a stone.

The first acts in which the little ones are allowed to appear before an audience are what are technically known as “acrobatic,” or “posturing” scenes. Those who watch these performances carefully will notice that the youngest ones of the party have very little to do, save to stand in the proper “position” and receive an occasional toss from the senior member of the group, which toss or throw sometimes looks as if very carelessly administered, but which is in reality done with the greatest care and gentleness. In fact, the modern system of teaching the business by emulation, instead of by threats and blows, makes the youngsters so ambitious that they are always begging to be taught new “acts,” and nine out of ten of the trifling falls they get in the ring are brought on by the attempt to accomplish more than they are really at the time capable of achieving. The love of applause is inborn with us all, and jealousy sometimes so rankles in the baby bosoms of these spangled little ones, that they would, if unchecked in their mad career often break their tiny necks in trying to out-do each other. To many an ambitious youngster the greatest possible known punishment is being debarred the privilege of appearing with his exultant companions in starred and tinsel finery, and exhibiting his hard-earned accomplishments to the applauding multitude. Most of the children in the profession at present are the offspring of performers, who are not afraid to have them taught the business, as the teaching is now done. Formerly many “circus actors,” particularly the mothers, would rather have laid their little ones in their coffins than see them brought up to the business of their parents. Remembering the blows and stripes of their own apprenticeship, few mothers could bear the thought of dying and leaving their tender babes exposed to the brutality of which they had themselves had such sad experience. It was for this reason that formerly many children were taken as circus apprentices from almshouses or from degraded parents, in whom the love of rum had extinguished all sparks of parental affection, and who would be consoled by a few dollars for the loss of their too-often unwelcome urchins. These unfortunate youngsters were, for the most part, “adopted” by irresponsible men, who, only too frequently, instead of properly teaching them the profession, would discard them as soon as they outgrew the “baby business,” and leave them to shift for themselves, while they sought younger victims. Children “adopted out” in this manner by greedy and selfish “Poor-masters,” were almost invariably treat-

ed in the most brutal manner, and seldom failed to run away from their masters as soon as age and experience had brought sufficient intelligence and knowledge of the world. Apprentices of this kind are seldom taken now, though only last week there was a suit in one of our City Courts, brought to recover, not the child, but money damages, from the Commissioners of Charities and Correction, for binding the infant out to a lady in the circus business. No cruelty to the little one was alleged; it was simply a barefaced attempt by a drunken woman, who had deserted her boy and left it to be taken care of by public charity, to recover money from the guardians of the City’s poor for doing the best they knew for the lad. Happily the Judge looked upon the matter in its proper light, and the blackmailing plaintiff was sent out of Court with a severe reprimand.

Many of the younger members of the trade at the present time are children of deceased riders or gymnasts, who have died happy in the knowledge that the friends who have adopted their “kids” will treat them as kindly and teach them their business just as thoroughly as though the parent was present overlooking the lessons in the flesh. Who that has read Dickens’ *Hard Times*, will forget the kindly offers of Manager Sleary and the women of his “horse-riding” troupe, to adopt and teach the business to little Sissy Jupe, whose father, the whilom[?] clown of the establishment, had, in a fit of despondency, run away from her. And who will forget how these riding and tumbling people, so heartily despised by Mr. Gradgrind, the man of “facts, Sir, facts,” afterward did that same hard man a most essential service by concealing his felon son, and running him out of the country, being moved by no hope or promise of reward, but only by their simple gratitude to the man who, despite his hardness and harshness to them, had yet been kind to little Cecilia, who had, when a very baby, been one of themselves.

In gymnastics the youngsters are first taught some simple posturing and the dancing positions, then comes what is technically known as the “split,” which consists in spreading the feet apart till the legs are at exact right angles with the upright body, a feat which any lissome lad or lass of six years or less can do almost without practice. Next they are taught “bending,” which means to throw the head back as far as possible toward the heels; this being learned, a grown person places his hand under the back of the youngster, when a slight toss, by throwing the feet over the head, transforms the “bend” into a “somersault.” When the child has mastered the backward and forward “somersault” the hardest of his education as a “tumbler” is over. The other feats come easily by practice—“vaulting,” “battoue leaps,” “spring-board somersaults,” “flip-flaps,” “hand springs,” “cart-wheels,” and the like are learned in a few months.

If the young person, either male or female, is to learn the tight-rope business, he or she is not, as one might suppose, exercised at first on a low rope stretched near the ground. On the contrary, the pupil is placed at once on a rope at as great an elevation as is required in the regular performance, and from the very first learns the business as it must afterward be done. There are two reasons for this—first, it accustoms the novice at once to the height; and second, it gives space for the employment of

the "balance pole," a long bar of twelve to twenty feet in length, and which, were the rope stretched low, would constantly embarrass the learner by striking the ground on either side. As it is absolutely necessary to future success that the performer should be perfectly bold and self-possessed, and not become timid by reason of hurts received in the falls which at first are unavoidably many, men are stationed on either side the rope, into whose ever-ready arms the youngster falls, and so never comes to serious grief however frequent are the tumbles.

When children first essay to ride alone, a heavy leather belt is buckled round the waist from this belt a long and strong cord passes through a ring in the top of the "pad" or "surcingle" and the free end is held in the hand of the "Ringmaster." If, being thus protected, the young master loses his feet, an instantaneous pull upon the cord draws him flat down on the back of the horse, and by no stretch of infantile ingenuity can he get under the animal's heels.

The apprentices frequently learn to ride the "pony act," in which the tiny pattern of a man, dressed as a jockey or a courier, urges on his steed with his shrill cries and many wavings of his little cap. This act is always ridden on two ponies and the young rider will contrive to slip and fall between his miniature steeds, while a thrill of horror pervades the crowd, who applaud most lustily when, the next minute, the plucky little fellow regains his feet, picks up the reins and drives on faster than ever. The compassionate audience need not waste their sympathies, however; this fall is merely one of the "tricks of the trade," introduced simply for "effect," and the cord, before described, would not let the rider fall if he wanted to. On the whole the improvement in the manner of training children for this sort of life is most marked and commendable. It is not a business to which every parent would care to bring up his little ones; but, after all, "people must be amused," and every one of these circus children is a thousand times better off in having an honest, though perhaps humble, trade than are the thousands of miserable little waifs that swarm in our streets and alleys, whose present condition is utter poverty, and whose surest expectation of a rise in life is grounded upon the hopes of a future of successful and undetected thievery.

One word more—many persons suppose that "circus riders" are invariably and inevitably given to drunkenness and dissipation. Never was there a more unjust aspersions—there are black sheep everywhere, but there is quite as great a proportion of true, honest wives, kindly, loving mothers and faithful husbands in this as in any other line of life—their misfortune in this regard is the same as that of the theatrical profession, viz.: that, owing to their public lives, every scandal in their ranks is grown and magnified, while people in quieter walks of life may, perhaps, be ten times more licentious, and yet not one-tenth as notorious.

The artist who has to back a fiery horse at night, or do a trapeze performance at a height so great that a fall from his dizzy perch would be almost certain death, is not likely to shake his nerve, or loosen his grip, by the use of intoxicating liquors, so there are few instances of habitual drunkenness among this class of professionals.

Period newspapers are loaded with accounts of rampaging elephants. The frequency of such incidents is startling; it seems an elephant went berserk about once a month. While a few wags noted that some elephant attacks took place in the press agent's imagination rather than on the show lot, one presumes most reports were factual. Romeo, Adam Forepaugh's big Asian male, was universally recognized as the toughest elephant in North America in the decade before his death in 1872. While he was indeed a killer, one has to wonder how his psyche was effected by the constant brutality he endured as part of the vicious and primitive training and handling practices of the day.

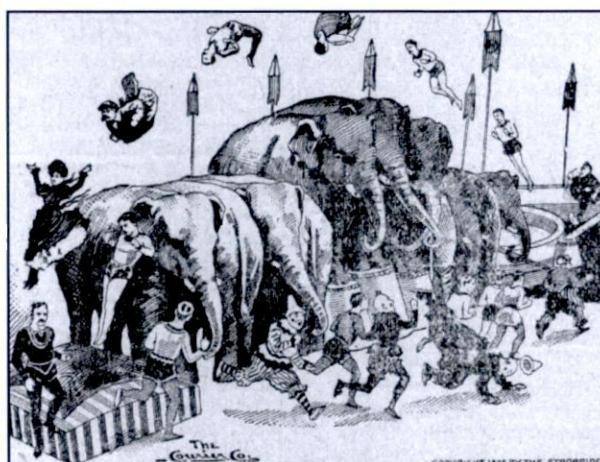
Contrary to this report, Romeo arrived in America in 1851 as one of the nine elephants imported for the Barnum Caravan show. He was originally named Canada. Seth B. Howes bought these elephants after the Barnum show stopped touring after the 1854 season, using some of them on his circus. He auctioned them in late 1855, at which time Canada was acquired by the Mabie Bros. Circus. In 1865 Adam Forepaugh acquired the Mabie show and its big male elephant.

An Elephant Attacking its Keeper, *Perth Courier*, Perth, Ontario, Canada, 15 March 1872, p. 5.

The tiger scene at Forepaugh menagerie, which created such intense excitement a few days ago, came very nearly being eclipsed on Wednesday morning last, by a performance of the trick elephant "Romeo," which was decidedly not set down in the bills. But for pro-intervention he would have killed his keeper, Mr. George Forepaugh.

On last Wednesday morning Mr. Forepaugh entered the stable in which Romeo is confined to put him through his customary ring lessons. Just for a moment he turned to look through a chink in the board at the training amphitheatre in which the horses were being exercised. This was the moment Romeo was waiting for. Like a flash he extended his huge trunk, and entwined it around the body of his keeper, and threw him up against the roof of the stable. Fortunately he fell upon a pile of blankets, where he lay stunned and helpless.

Now to complete the work of death.—The long trunk was again extended and wrapped around a foot of the prostrate man. In another moment he will have met the fearful doom overshadowing him. Just at this moment Chas. Forepaugh enters, sees his brother's danger, and utters a cry of horror as he springs for his training spear. Deep, deep into the trunk of the beast goes the iron barb, and blood spurts out as it is



withdrawn. Still the hold is not relaxed, and the keeper still lies upon the grave's verge. Again and again is the shaft applied and the whole head of "Romeo" is bathed in blood. He can stand the pain no longer, and, releasing his hold, backs against the wall. Then in an instant Mr. Forepaugh is dragged from his perilous position. He is considerably bruised, but beyond that has suffered no serious injury.

This elephant is the most vicious animal of the kind in the country. He was brought here in 1865 by Mr. Mabie and purchased after his death by Mr. Adam Forepaugh. He is beyond all odds the best performing elephant in the country, and is for that reason extremely valuable, or he would have been killed long ago by reason of his malicious fits that come upon him in spells. He has already killed five keepers, the latest being the case in Hatboro, in 1867, which created such an intense excitement that all the farmers around carried rifles with them whenever they ventured from home, so great was the terror created by the antics of "Romeo."

The five keepers killed by "Romeo" are as follows:—Shortly after his arrival in this country and before he was brought thoroughly under submission, he killed an East Indian named Weeks, who came over with him. This was his first deed of blood. The next was the killing of the keeper Moran while the show was exhibiting in Canada. The next victim was Nicholas Mick, who met his fearful doom in Missouri. After him came "Long John Evans," killed during a summer tour of the circus in Florida. The last, and that which lives latest in the memory of the public, is the sad death of Bill Williams, alias "Canada Bill," which occurred in Hatboro, in this state, in 1867.—*Philadelphia Telegraph*.

Newspapers often published behind the scenes accounts of the circus business, an indication of the public's fascination with things tanbark. This one illustrates the problems of trouping in areas "where large gangs of rough men are congregated." It also does a fine job delineating the duties of the advance agent, and the hardships of traveling over primitive roads.

Circuses and Circus Men. How the Arabs of the Tent Live, Move and Have Their Being—What it Costs to Keep a Traveling Show Going, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 27 April 1872, p. 1.

The Summer is to all circuses and menageries, with their innumerable attendants of "side shows," the season of harvest, and is to most of them the only harvest of the year. There are very few establishments which, like Lent's or Barnum's, of New York, manage to reap a continuous reward of greenbacks from January to New Year's again, by having a handsome house waiting in town to receive them for the Winter as soon as their pleasant Summer wanderings in the country are concluded.

By far the greater number of the circus proprietors at the approach of cold weather retire to some quiet, inexpensive country village, where the wagons and baggage can be stored and the horses can be taked (sic) care of at small cost till Spring opens again. The Company of performers is dismissed and the various artists seek engagement in variety halls or other permanent places, failing to obtain, which they must need, like the "busy bees," live

on the honey, or money, they have stored, until once more the mild breath of April announces that for them the season of work is again approaching.

Within a few years the circus business, instead of being the vagabond resort of any reckless speculator who could raise a few hundred dollars and induce a few half taught, clumsy performers to join his fortunes, trusting to "good business" for their pay, has become the channel of

LARGE LEGITIMATE INVESTMENTS,

by bona fide capitalists, and so much money is used, and so many men are directly and indirectly employed, that now the show business must be reckoned among the recognized industries of the country. It is but a few years ago that a single tent—intended only to entertain the dead-head gaze of non-paying outsiders, rather than to shelter the paying audiences from sun and shower; two or three riders, as many gymnasts and acrobats, and a jaded clown, with a stock of stale jokes as ancient as himself, sufficed to answer all the requirements of our very easily pleased rural friends. Nowadays, however, nothing less pretentious than a grand triumphal procession, headed by strange beasts, striding to the sound of martial music; the most gorgeous trappings and dresses; the most ample and luxurious cushioned seats and arrangements for seeing whatever is to be seen; the most beautiful and miraculously trained steeds, and chief of all, a company of professional performers, whose fame in Europe is only equaled by their tremendous success in the New World, will suffice to attract paying audiences and render the progress of the Circus a triumphal march through never-ceasing showers of greenbacks to success and fortune.

THIS SEASON

There are, in several instances, three or four, or even more, separate shows announced as constituting a single establishment; and there will be a menagerie, a circus, a museum, an exhibition of wax figures, a minstrel band, the whole occupying four, five, or in one instance six pavilions, and all to be seen for a single price of admission. As it would probably not be remunerative for some of these large concerns to visit the smaller villages, they arrange only to go to the larger towns and the cities, traveling for the most part by railroad. For this purpose they have cars of their own, built for their especial accommodation, in which not only are the people provided with every feasible comfort, but all the baggage and requisite appurtenances are stowed in the smallest possible space. Either the route is so laid out by the advance agent as to touch railroads of only a certain never varying gauge, or the circus cars are provided with the means of adapting themselves to the different tracks by means of variable axles, or other patent devices. When the traveling is done in this manner it is probable that the performers and the ring stock will be in better plight to delight their audiences than if they had the tedious journeys by night, over all sorts of roads and through all sorts of weather.

The mere

COST OF FITTING OUT

one of these immense concerns for the route, without reckoning the value of any menagerie or other curiosities that may constitute part of the show, before a day's salary has been paid, and before the line of march is taken up, is from \$90,000 to \$100,000 to nearly double that sum.

This comprehends the entire outfit of tents, wagons, tent poles, seats, tools, carpets, draught and performing horses, the gilded band chariots, trapping for horses, stock dresses for certain of the performers, lamps, banners, all the house paraphernalia, and pantomime or afterpiece properties, together with the immense lot of spare rope, canvas, tools, lumber and extras of every imaginable sort. These last two items are of very considerable account; it would never do to depend on the scanty facilities of the roadside blacksmith or the "four corner" wheelwright for repairs to a serious and sudden breakdown.

THE DAILY EXPENSES

of such an establishment range from \$500 to \$1,200, varying with the size of the company, the nature of the country and the completeness of the arrangements made by the advance agents. The organization must be most thorough of the whole little community. Every man knows his exact duties under all circumstances—not only what is his regular work in case all goes well, but his station and duties in unusual emergencies, as in the case of a stampede of the horses, an extensive breakdown of the wagons, fording rivers when bridges have been carried away, or otherwise overcoming the difficulties of ill made and badly kept road. Even should a fight be forced on the company by a crowd of country bullies, every man of the show at the call hastens to his proper station, seizes his proper weapon, which may be a tent stake, a maul, a sledge or an iron bar, and quietly waits orders. Everything is conducted in man of war fashion, and when all hands are beat to quarters every man springs at once to his place. There is no quieter and less quarrelsome set of men than a circus company

ON THEIR TRAVELS,

nor is there any set of men better able to defend themselves when the emergency comes. They will endure almost any amount of imposition and insult rather than fight; for a general fight means probably the immediate destruction of much valuable property, or at any rate the severe injury of many persons and the ill will of the very persons on whose good will so much depends. Then there is always after trouble with the officers of the law, prosecutions, arrests, and at the very least delay, and in their business delay is ruin. Yet in certain localities where large gangs of rough men are congregated, as in mining districts, or where railroad or canal work is being carried on, it is a very common amusement for these roughs to band together and attempt to "clean out the circus men." These attempts usually end in the utter discomfiture of the attacking party, because, however overwhelming may be their superior numbers, by just so much as training, organization and discipline are superior to mere mob law and ill directed individual brute courage and strength, by just exactly so much do the circus men have the advan-



tage. Instances have been known, however, of the utter defeat of the company, where the property, tents, wagons, &c., have been heaped up and burned, their stock cut loose and stolen, and the men forced to fly for their lives.

THE FIRST STEPS

in a Summer's campaign are taken by the manager long months in advance. The manager first secures his "stars," or those performers whose special feats of horsemanship, gymnastics, or other circus work, are to constitute his great attraction for the season. These engagements are months, and in some cases years, in advance; there are certain first class performers who are this Summer serving out the second or third year of a contract, and who have as many more years to work. It is necessary that these arrangements be made so long in advance, in order that the immense show bills and posters may be prepared. These are always elaborately gotten up, as our readers all know, and the large engravings require months of careful preparation. Beside the large pictures of men and horses on the largest

SHOW BILLS,

which are all engraved on wooden blocks, every leading circus has now a series of fine portraits, in costume and in plain citizens' dress, made of its most distinguished artists. These are lithographed or drawn on and printed from stone tablets; they are generally very good though rather flattened likenesses, and many of them are really excellent considered as works of lithographic art. These are not for out-door wear, but are hung up in hotels, saloons, railroad offices, and other public places where they will be certain to attract attention and secure the admiration of the paying public.

The route finally decided on, the advance agent starts on his journey. He precedes the show from two to four weeks, and his duties are to make contracts for every dollar's worth of expense that can be foreseen. He arranges primarily with the town authorities for a license to perform. In some States it is required to take out an expensive State license, in addition to which the "Selectmen" or "Trustees" of each village may, if they choose, charge a local fee. These local licenses run from \$25 up to \$200,—some towns which suffer under the misfortune of having avaricious or strait laced men on their local boards, even making their towns practically "circus proof" by demanding a sum so large that no one will pay it. The agent having settled this matter, next makes contracts with the hotel keepers for furnishing a certain number of meals, for which every breakfast and dinner is specified. Also for the feeding of a number of horses agreed upon with a specified quantity of hay and grain each. This

PATRONAGE

is usually given to one single hotel if a contract can be made with a landlord to undertake the whole, rather than to scatter the people and the animals in different places about the town.

Then the newspapers are visited, advertisements and editorial notices agreed upon, the usual number of "complimentary tickets" proffered and not declined. Then the owner of some suitable "lot" of ground on which to exhibit must be found, unless, as is often the case, the sum paid for the local license also includes the rent of the village square or other suitable piece of public property.

If a lot is hired from a private owner, he is usually paid from \$50 to \$75 for the use of his land and the approaches thereto for twenty-four hours. If a menagerie constitutes part of the coming exhibition, agreements are also made with butchers and others to furnish certain quantities of meat and proper vegetables for the animals. Not a penny of money is paid by this advance agent, save only his own personal expenses. He makes a written contract with each man he bargains with, which contract is properly signed, witnessed and stamped.

Close on the heels of the contract agent come the rest of the advance workers, consisting, for the most part, of the

"PASTE BRIGADE,"

or squad of men, whose duty it is to properly post the enormous show bills and to distribute the lithographs, programmes, and other advertising schemes. This platoon consists of a head poster, at \$40 to \$50 a month and his board, and two or three assistants, who each receive about \$35 a month and expenses.

A town of 2,000 people will require all of \$200 worth of advances posters, while a city like Rochester or Buffalo cannot be well "billed" for less than \$600 to \$1,000. This is exclusive of all lithographs, small bills, newspaper advertising, and the occasional posters which are placed on roadside barns, blacksmith shops, and other favorable sites discovered by the keen eye of the "head poster," as they drive their light wagons through the country. Occasionally the owner of some specially desirable dead wall or high fence will demand pay for the privilege of putting up bills; as a general thing, however, a few free tickets to the "show" pay all such bills.

The advance work being done and the country all agog to see the wonders of the coming exhibition, at the appointed time the monster establishment appears.

The imposing

"GRANDTRIUMPHAL PROCESSION"

being over with, the performers seek rest in their respective lodging houses, while the workmen proceed to "occupy and possess" their land and erect the great tents. Traveling with the circus is a man known as the "layer-out," whose duties are peculiar. Hurrying on a few hours in advance of the caravan, he goes over to the hotel, selects the most desirable rooms for each of the managers and leading performers as have ladies and children, and then assigns the bedrooms for the occupation of the various members according to their status in the company, arranges for any extra meals, procures any favor or special accommodations made necessary on account of sickness of any member of the party; in short, keeps a particularly sharp eye to all things that are not specially provided for in the contract, so that the keen landlord may not be able to "stick" the management for a long bill of "extras" that were not "in the bond."

Of the men not performers

WHO RECEIVE HIGH SALARIES,

there are the head teamsters, of whom there are generally three or four. Each one will have charge of one of the different sets of horses—for instance, one set of horses draws the performers' baggage and horse trappings; another, the canvas, centre poles, guy ropes and chains; another the ring curb, tools, stakes, chains and miscella-

neous material. These teamsters are their own hostlers, never trusting the care of any of their stock to unknown men.

The pay of circus performers is by no means commensurate with the risks they must sometimes run and with the years of toil required to learn the business.

GYMNASTS AND ACROBATS

get \$75 to \$100 a week and their expenses for the traveling season. First class riders, both men and women, receive from \$60 to \$175 a week and expenses (board and traveling expenses); good clowns from \$75 to \$100. Ordinary riders and gymnasts, who are not "starred" in the bills get \$25 to \$50 per week. Star equestrians like James Melville, James Robinson, and Robert Stickney are paid \$600 to \$1,200 a month for personal services. They also receive a large sum for their trained horses, and in the case of Melville and Robinson, for the performances of their children. Some of these performers are thrifty and become rich. Pentland, lately the clown at the Fourteenth street Circus owns several valuable houses in New York and Brooklyn. Melville, the Australian rider, lives in a house of his own in Thirty-fourth street, and owns others in Sixth avenue. James Robinson is well off and now has a circus of his own. Many others also have made fortunes and lost them by investing in the same precarious business.

TRICK HORSES

are held at from \$1,000 to \$30,000 each by their owners; this last sum, it is said, having been refused by Dan Rice for his blind white horse "Excelsior." "Pad" horses cost \$1,200 to \$1,500 each. "Bareback" act steeds call for \$1,500 to \$2,500 each. Trick ponies, \$400 to \$1,000, and trick mules will sometimes bring \$1,000 a pair. Ordinary draught horses cost \$500 to \$800 a pair. A new tent eight feet in diameter, with seats, poles, ropes, etc., is worth \$5,000. The band chariot will cost from \$6,000 to \$15,000, according to size and workmanship. Common baggage wagons cost \$300 to \$700 each.

A set of entre horse

TRAPPINGS AND DRESSES

for the rider will cost from \$1,500 to \$2,200. The ring carpet for tumbling and acrobatic feats may cost from \$200 to \$500. The one used at Fourteenth street last season was of velvet and cost \$1,300.

All gymnastic apparatus, such as spring boards, battoe boards, bars, perche, trapeze, tight rope, etc., is expensive, as one or two men have a monopoly of making them. I have names of thirty-one circuses which start this month; they employ from 120 to 260 men each. Each concern has from 25 to 70 wagons, and from 80 to 220 horses. The average cost of fitting out these for the road is \$90,000, from which fact our readers can form some idea of the extent of the business and the amount of capital employed therein.—*New York Mail*.

In the spring of 1872 the journalist Arthur Pember, the prototype of George Plimpton and Charles Kuralt, spent a week working incognito in the prop department of the Howe's Great London Circus. His chronicle of that experience is one of the best accounts of circus life in the 1870s, his amateur standing giving him a different perspective

than that of circus professionals. This article had no attribution when first published in the New York Times. We know Pember was the author because a slightly-expanded version of this story appeared in his 1874 book, The Mysteries and Miseries of the Great Metropolis with Some Adventures in the Country; Being the Disguises and Surprises of a New York Journalist.

Life in a Circus, *New York Times*, New York, New York, 19 May 1872, p. 10.

While traveling recently in Rhode Island, writer met with Howes & Sanger's circus and menagerie, and being acquainted with the proprietors, was induced to travel with them for several days in the guise of a supernumerary, thereby gaining a tolerable insight into life as found in a circus.

The afternoon performance was about to begin, so I was divested of my journalistic jacket, thrust into a scarlet coat that was too small for me, and told to assist in putting the fancy trappings on the ladies' horses and make myself generally useful in the entryway of the ring. Within twenty minutes of my engagement my "boss" confidentially told the ring-manager that "that new supe you've on don't seem to amount to much." The ring-manager replied, however, that it was none of his business; that Mr. Howes had taken me on. An hour afterward my "boss" declared to Mr. Howes himself that I "wasn't worth a cent a day, and that he had better 'shake' me as soon as possible." Before the performance was half over he had sworn at me a dozen times for didling about, (ignorance of my duties compelled me to confine my efforts to carrying the resin-board, on which the acrobats and gymnasts rubbed the soles of their shoes, into the ring); and after the final act he indignantly remonstrated with Mr. Howes, whose unusual passiveness he could not understand.

I had not been long a member of the circus troupe before I discovered that all my previous ideas with regard to this class of people were totally erroneous—at least so far as those with whom I was thrown in contact were concerned. I had expected to find myself among a rollicking, roystering set of men, who preferred short pipes and tories of ale to wine and cigars, and whose dressing-room was a theatrical exhibition of everything that is coarse and objectionable. And I had more than a vague suspicion that some of the ladies might be a little loose in their notions of strict propriety. I was astonished to meet a company of staid and decorous ladies and gentlemen, quiet and rather reserved in manner, and, so far from having a liking for dissipation, that they were only too anxious to get to bed as soon as they got home from the evening performance. Nearly all the ladies in the troupe are the wives of the gentlemen in the troupe. Among the riding "stars" there is one family, comprising two brothers, the wife of one of the brothers, and three sisters. They are connected marriage with Mr. Howes, and, even if he were careless on that subject, and he is not by any means, they would not tolerate for one moment the companionship of any one against whom there was a breath of suspicion. The leading clown has his wife in the troupe; so has the leading acrobat, the band-master, some of the somersault leapers and others. Even the women who sell lemonade, oranges, cake and candy are wives of

the ticket-sellers or other employees. A few of them have a young child or two with them. The leading clown, or, as he should more properly be termed, the jester—for he takes for his model the Court fools of the Middle Ages—has been in the ring for five-and-twenty years. He has been all through Europe, in Australia, India, China, Japan, the Feejee Islands, and Egypt, and has even paid a visit of pleasure to the Arctic regions in a whaling-ship. Being a man of thought and intelligence, he has stored his mind with a mass of the most interesting information. He has, as have all his companions, a great idea of sustaining the good name and reputation of the profession. Another thing particularly struck me—the dress of the lady riders. There was none of that prurient suggestiveness about it which is doing so much to demoralize the stage. It was neat and tasteful, yet pretty and attractive, only short enough to enable them to go through their acts, and free from all unnecessary exposure of the shoulders and bosom. I cannot, I think, furnish stronger testimony to the general demeanor of our company than by quoting a remark which I happened to overhear made by the landlord of one of the hotels where we stopped to one of his other guests: "If I had not been at the entrance when they arrived, I should not have known that there was a circus-man in the house." There were over thirty of us in that hotel.

Circus life begins very early in the morning. It could hardly well begin much earlier, unless it began the night before. But, when it is considered that the journey from one town to another often occupies six hours, and that the doors are open for the midday performance at 1 o'clock, it is evident that this is necessary. The company is divided into four detachments. The first—the hostlers—starts with the stable tents at 2 o'clock; the second, with the menagerie and circus tents, starts at 3 o'clock; the cages of animals and the enormous pageantry chariots follow them; and all the performers start as soon as they have got through their 4 o'clock breakfast. One very strict rule brings every man to his post at the right time for starting; no one is allowed to ride on any other wagon than his own. To those, like myself, unaccustomed to sleeping in the daytime, going to bed at 11 1/2 and getting up at 3 1/2 is a terrible infliction. But after an hour's ride in the fresh, bracing air of the early morning, one's energies are soon alive, and an interest is aroused in the game of euchre or whist going on in one of the omnibus, and in the running fire of badinage which is kept up all along the line as those members of the company who have buggies of their own pass wagon after wagon. When the foot of a hill is reached most of the men turn out and walk, so as to ease the teams, and many a back-somersault is turned on the high road, with only a few startled cows looking over the fence by way of spectators. I liked to walk by the side of the elephants. They march with such a solemn, stately tread, as though they were a mere lifeless mass moved by means of machinery. I had made great friends with one of them, and used to put a roll in my pocket every morning for him to steal. One morning I put it in the wrong pocket, and he got nothing but my pipe and tobacco, which, on finding out his mistake, he very knowingly replaced. He was an animal of considerable intelligence; for, one morning, when a young urchin

by the roadside said to his companion, "Shouldn't I like to have a ride on that elephant," I could have sworn that my friend of the trunk winked at me, as much as to say, "Don't he wish he may get it." By the way, these elephants are really very wonderful animals. Their performance in the ring is marvelous, considering that their training only began in January last. They will shuffle round the ring at a great pace like the trained horses, walk on three legs, stand on their hind-legs, stand on their fore-legs, using their trunks as a support; go round the ring waltzing, and form themselves into pyramidal groups on pedestals of different heights. One of them even goes up a ladder, turns round, and comes down head first. And yet their trainer told me they can do still more wonderful tricks, though he is not yet sufficiently sure of them to exhibit them in the ring. Behind the elephants come four beautiful tamed zebras drawing an elegant little park phaeton. They used to cause me a good deal of amusement as we passed through the villages. The rustics would almost invariably exclaim, "Look at them painted donkey." It was the same in the show. The provincials had never heard of tame zebras before, for the very good reason that these are believed to be the first that have ever been trained. There was always a crowd gathered around them discussing the question as whether they were painted donkeys or really zebras. I heard one man, who evidently thought he was arguing the matter very logically, exclaim to a knot of listeners: "See here now, them ain't zebers; don't you see they're all marked alike? They've been fools enough to paint 'em all to one pattern." It was just the same with the team of eight spotted donkeys. The unsophisticated rustics would have it that they were painted.

By the time the circus and menagerie tents arrive on the ground, the stable tents are all erected—ten of them in all; for with the draft horses, the pad horses, the trick horses, ponies and donkeys, stabling is required for 200 animals. While the hostlers unharness the teams, and feed and groom them, the tent men remove the canvas, heavy tent poles, and seats from the wagons, and the foreman proceeds to lay out the ring. Laying out the ring is rather a nice operation. It must be a perfect circle, and of an exact diameter, otherwise the horses would be thrown out of their stride when going round it. The bank of earth which encloses it is formed by plowing several furrows, and then shoveling the earth up. A man must have a very correct eye and have his team under perfect control to plow a true circle; for he has nothing but his eye to guide him. While he is at work the tent men swarm about. And yet no one gets in another's way; for every one has his own poles to raise, his tent-pegs to drive, his seats to erect in a certain section of the tent, or his allotted portion of the canvas to attend to.

The whole thing is done as if by clock-work and almost as rapidly as the erection of the fairy palaces in the Arabian Nights. I traveled with the tent men one morning for the express purpose of seeing the tents erected. They were put up, both the circus and the menagerie tents, in a little under two hours. Now the circus tent itself, though not so big as the Circus Maximus of old Rome, which was one mile in circumference, is 130 feet across, and holds over six thousand people. One would have

thought that it would occupy a whole day to put up the seats alone. The menagerie tent is only a little smaller than the circus tent. As soon as the animal cages and chariots arrive their canvas coverings are removed, the tires, axles, and springs are examined, and the dust or mud removed from the wheels. Presently the omnibuses, rockaways and buggies containing the performers and the band begin to arrive in rapid succession, their occupants hurrying away immediately for the dressing tents. Of the ladies' dressing-tent of course I am unable to say anything. The men's tent presents a most curious spectacle in the course of five minutes. In the centre stands a sort of high pedestal with small looking-glasses arranged on the top. Before one glass stands the "funny" clown, applying any amount of mutton fat to his face and neck before he puts on the powdered whitening and vermillion paint, which is to give to his face the conventional half-ghastly, half comical appearance which clowns affect. At the next glass stands a stalwart fellow, with nothing on but fleshings and a pair of high jack boots, dyeing his mustache to a beautiful black. Peeping over his shoulder is a companion, whose only garment is supposed to be a steel corselet, putting at least a quarter of a pint of oil upon his hair. All around are huge cases; one filled with breast-plates, another with helmets, others with lances, flags and banners, and others with great crimson jack boots. "Helmet for No. 10," cries the property man, and No. 10, perhaps almost in a state of nudity, makes a short-cut to the property man by means of a somersaults. (All the performers are required to ride in the procession.) "Breast-plate for No. 16," calls another property-man; and No. 16, who is shaving, nearly cuts a piece out of his cheek. Down goes the razor, for the rules against keeping the property-man waiting are very stringent, as I found out to my cost the one morning I rode in the procession. It was on the second day of my circus life, and in the good City of Providence, that I made my first and last appearance as a knight in full armor in the public streets. My costume consisted of a corselet and petticoat, such as were worn by the old crusaders; a steel breast-plate, a steel helmet, with visor and nodding plumes, and a pair of large crimson boots, reaching to the knee. The property-man also furnished me with a gigantic battle-ax, and gave me very brief instructions as to how I should carry it.

When we were all mounted—we were fifteen knights and fifteen ladies—and the remainder of the procession was all in order, the world "all ready" was given, the four heralds sounded their trumpets, the band struck up a martial air, and the next moment we were marching in solemn procession through the crowded streets for the delectation of the youth and infancy of Providence. The boys cheered, the men stared in an idle sort of way, and the little children clapped their hands; and all along the route we were criticized by young and old. Remarks such as "Look at them chariots!" "Say! Ain't that the biggest show you ever see?" and to the knights, "Say, boss! Ain't you mighty fine!" greeted us from every side. But I had not gone a hundred yards before I discovered that my saddle was a most uncomfortable one, and that it is very difficult for a novice to carry himself with that martial bearing so imperative in circus street-processions. But the discomfort of my saddle was a trifle to the suffering I was soon to

endure from my helmet. The thermometer stood 85 degrees, and the rays of the sun shot down on the polished surface of the helmet with such intensity that I felt as if my head was being roasted. I am sure that I could have steamed potatoes inside that helmet, or broiled a porter-house steak on the outside of it. It was a patent cooking-stove on a small scale—generating, as the stove-founders say in their advertisements, an immense amount of heat with absolutely no consumption of fuel. And I endured that agony for one hour before we returned to the tents, when I took the first opportunity to feel if my hair was singed. Like a camel, I rushed for a bucket of water, threw my helmet on the ground, and dashed my head under the water. The next moment I lay spluttering at full length upon the ground, with the sensation that a cannon-ball had struck me somewhere near the region of the heart. I picked myself up slowly, and confronted that awful property-man. It was he, and not a cannon-ball, who had knocked me down. "You're a nice sort of cuss to go chucking the properties about like that," he exclaimed, as he picked up the helmet and strode away. Fortunately for me, my friend had so much to attend to that he hadn't time to knock me down again. Otherwise, I think he would have done so, for he was very angry, stood about six feet two inches, and was very powerfully built. As soon as the company had resumed the costume of the nineteenth century, they all hurried off to the different hotels to which they were assigned—some of snatch an hour's sleep before dinner, others to write letters, and others, again, to lounge about and smoke. I retired to my room to see if any of my ribs were broken.

I joined the company at dinner that, for the first time, and found myself seated opposite to one of them whom I had not yet seen. I sat down in mute astonishment. Mr. Pickwick [Samuel Pickwick, the major character in the *Pickwick Papers*, the book that made Charles Dickens a literary sensation in 1836 and 1837] would have gazed at him through his gold spectacles in utter amazement. Sam Weller [Pickwick's loyal and sagacious Cockney servant] would have heartily enjoyed the contemplation of him for a good hour. It was the mammoth fat boy, aged eight years. I could not take my eyes off him, and he stared at me with a sort of stolid indifference as he piled his food into his capacious mouth. This young eight-year old ate to such an enormous extent that I expected every moment to see his jacket split. He is very great on roasted chicken, and a roasted chicken was provided for him. A six weeks old kitten could not have made a meal off what he left of that chicken. I forgot to count how many potatoes he ate; but he ate six good-sized hot biscuits, of which he is very fond. His mother sat at his right hand, and every minute it was: "Marmy, I want some more chicken—Marmy, more biscuit—Marmy, more potatoes." In addition he ate half of a very large custard pie, and wound up with an enormous bunch of molasses cake and two oranges. He drank the necessary quantity of water to wash this immense mass of food down. His mother told me that he eats "four good square meals a day." (I should call them cubic meals.) and that he "eats whenever he can get a chance between whiles." A good supply of food is always placed by his bedside at night, because he is apt to wake hungry in the night. Perhaps the most marvelous

thing about him is that he has never had a day's sickness in his life. I met this infant prodigy the next day in the show between performances, and I asked his mother to allow me to measure him. She readily acceded to my request, and, in fact, took down his dimensions as I measured him. The task was an easy one, as he was dressed in the fashion of a child of three years of age—bare arms and chest. The following are the statistical results of the measurement of this eight-year-old:

He measured seventeen inches round the throat, fifty-eight inches round the chest over the arms, fifty-one inches round the waist, thirty-one inches round the thigh, nineteen inches round the leg, below the knee, and twenty-three inches round the head. He is four feet seven inches high. I felt the boy's arms and chest, and it was just like handling so much dough. If you prod him with your finger, the flesh goes in like an India rubber ball, and when he sits down he seems to flatten and spread out over the chair. This infant enormity was born on the 25th December, 1863. I endeavored to verify the fact of his age by making inquiries of those performers who were in the show with him last year. They all told me that there was no doubt about his age, for while they were traveling last Summer, he was shedding his first set of teeth; and one or two told me that they had known him for four years, and had watched his extraordinary growth. I had been so intently studying the fat boy that it was some time before my attention was attracted to his immediate neighbors. At his left hand sat rather a petite-looking young lady, nineteen years old, with a full beard and moustache; and next to her sat a little lady of eight and twenty years of age and thirty-two inches in height, in a child's high chair. She is married to one of the employees of the circus, who is an ordinary-sized man, and, strange as it may appear, they say that she rules him with an iron rod by constantly threatening to get a divorce from him. Of course, as she brings him a considerable annual income by exhibiting herself, this is about the last thing he would wish her to do. She gave us a taste of her quality during dinner. The "funny" clown came in late, and, on taking his seat opposite the party, said: "Well, my 'small by degrees and beautifully less' how are you all this hot day?" "Sir," exclaimed the little woman, firing up in an instant, "I will thank you to treat me as a lady; you deserve to have your ears well boxed. If my husband was here you wouldn't dare to address me so."

Left to my own devices during the afternoon performance, I took my stand in the entry and watched the performance from beginning to end, from perhaps the most desirable of all points of view. Our company boasted several first class "stars." We had one lady who leaped from the back of her horse through four balloons at one leap with apparently as much ease as I could walk through a doorway, and undoubtedly, with more grace. We had another lady who thought nothing of kneeling on one knee on her husband's shoulder as he went round the ring standing on his horse's back. We had a gentleman who turned double somersaults over seven horses. He also performed the difficult feat of jumping on to a bare-backed running horse without touching him with his hands. He appeared simply to be running to catch the horse, but suddenly he seemed to fly from the ground and

instantaneously his feet were firmly planted on the horse's back. This act was always the signal for a storm of applause, cat-calls, whistling, and every other conceivable noise. We had an acrobat whose little boy held himself with his feet in the air, holding on his father's outstretched arm by simply one hand. We had two gymnasts who performed on three bars, and who always alighted on the ground in the very last way one would have anticipated. And we had the sarcastic humor of the jester, and the drolleries of the funniest of funny clowns. I confess that I enjoyed the thing immensely and was not surprised to learn from Mr. Howes the following day that they had been compelled to refuse admission to the best part of two thousand persons at the evening performance.

But it was supper-time, and I strolled back to the hotel. I leisurely went though a course of what Sam Weller called "rinsing," and then repaired to the dining-room. To my surprise I saw my "boss" standing by the side of Mr. Howes as he sat at table, and evidently talking in a very emphatic strain. Judge then his astonishment on seeing his chief rise from his seat, wish me good evening as he shook me by the hand, and offer me the vacant chair by his side. Poor fellow! He hastily retired; muttering very audibly—"Well, I'm d----d." Mr. Howes told me afterward that he had been remonstrating most energetically against my being retained any longer. That he had complained that I was doing more harm than good, as the other supes were becoming dissatisfied at the leniency shown to me while they were inexorably kept up to the scratch. We laughed heartily over it together, and before the commencement of the evening performance Mr. Howes walked arm in arm with me through the different tents. This action added still further to the mystery surrounding me; and before I left the circus there was an impression abroad that I was there with a view to purchasing an interest in the concern. Indeed! The small amount of ready money that I could raise would hardly persuade the proprietors of the show to part with a tent peg! The show could not be replaced to-morrow under an expenditure of from \$350,000 to \$400,000. Long before I took my departure my "boss" and I were on the most friendly terms. I told him confidentially who I was, and no one could have laughed more heartily than he did over the way in which he had been taken in. Said he: "I have been thirteen years with my present employer in the circus business, and this is the biggest circus joke that has ever been played on me."

On the morning of the second day of our stay in Providence, I lit a cigar after breakfast and strolled down to the circus. On entering the menagerie tent, I discovered the proprietor of the show seated on a bench and watching the tiger trainer cleaning the tigers' cage. There were five tigers in the cage, all royal, and the most magnificent brutes that I ever saw. "How those fellows would make mince-meat of you or me, did we venture into their cage," I remarked. "Yes, if we went in alone," he replied; "but that man has them under such perfect control, that I would walk in there this minute without a moment's hesitation. Would you like to go in; there's no danger." I turned the matter over in my mind for a minute or two, and then approached the cage and asked the tamer what he thought about the matter. He replied to my inquiry by

driving all the tigers into one corner with his whip, and opening the door of the cage. The next moment I stood face to face with these fierce, splendidly ferocious animals, with only the tamer between us. For a few seconds they glared fiercely at me as though about to spring, and I clutched more fiercely the latch of the barred door. Then one raised himself on his hind legs to his full length, resting his enormous paws upon the upper cross-bar of the cage. He snarled fearfully at me, and his velvety tail swept backward and forward in the most ominous manner. The jaws of death were wide open before me, and it seemed as if I could look half way down his throat. But the keeper kept his eye steadfastly upon him, and the upraised whip cowed him into submission. The others paced uneasily up and down the end of the cage, evidently longing to make a meal of me, and uttering continually that horrible snarl peculiar to tigers; showing their gaping throats and tremendous fangs every time they did so. I opened the door of the cage and sprang out as the keeper's whip descended on the shoulders of one which was crouching for a spring, not being desirous of giving him a ghost of a chance. The keeper himself shortly afterward left the cage, and the animals at once gave bent to the excitement under which they were laboring. They bounded backward and forward in the cage, fought among themselves, and told me as plainly as mute action could do how great was their disappointment that they were not then engaged in picking my bones. They did not quiet down for half an hour afterward; but being safely outside the cage, I could afford to laugh at their angry demonstrations, and did laugh heartily when Mr. Howes told me a story of a small boy who gave as his reason for envying the Prophet Daniel, that Daniel had been in the lion's den and had seen the show for nothing.

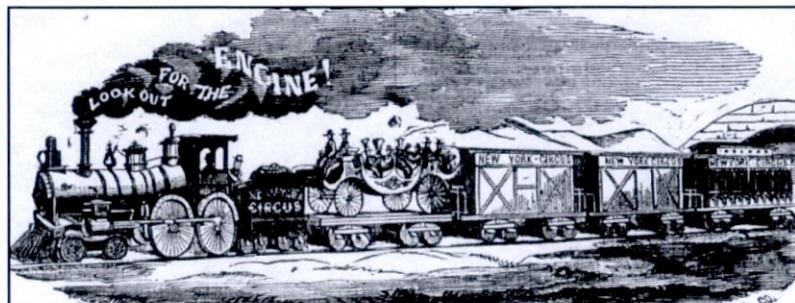
Having done with the tigers, and it being about mid-day, Mr. Howes proposed that we should stroll down and see the men at their dinner. There they were, some seventy or eight of them, seated at long tables in their tented dining-room. Their dinner consisted of the very best beef-steak, roasted pork, fried liver and bacon, stewed tomatoes, turnips, potatoes, pie and pudding. Everything was appetizing to the senses, and I expressed my surprise at the sumptuousness of the repast for that class of men. "I find," rejoined Mr. Howes, "that by giving my men all they want of the best of food, I get more work out of them, and it is much more willingly done." I asked him where they all slept. "Well," said he, "I have a capital system of tenting the men; but, as a general thing they prefer to sleep in the open air or in the stable tents." He showed me the sleeping arrangements. They consisted of a series of arched frames covered with thick tarpauling, very much like the movable tops of grocers' wagons. They run in sets, each fitting inside a larger one, so that they can be packed together and easily transported. They are all provided with mattresses to fit them; but it is only in wet weather that the men can be persuaded to use them. That same night I took a stroll through the tents in company with the watchman, and it certainly was a curious spectacle to see these great, brawny fellows lying sound asleep in all directions, many of them within a foot or two of their horse's heels. An hour after, the scene was lively to a degree. Everyone was awake and preparing for the

day's march. Some were tethering and watering the horses, some taking down the tents, other packing them away in the wagons. In another hour, the stable detachment had started; in another hour, no vestige of the circus was to be seen, save the broken down ring and its soiled sawdust. And yet some peculiar fascination had drawn a crowd of small boys to the spot, even at that early hour. The whole scene looked like some banqueting hall the morning after a feast, or a ball room when the daylight has driven away the dancers.

Before leaving my friends--the knights of the sawdust—I was exceedingly anxious to try my hand at riding round the magic circle, and I persuaded the ring-master to have a pad put on a horse for my benefit. I mounted with any amount of confidence and bravado, in spite of his assurance that I was "certain to come to grief." But I relied on the saw-dust as being soft tumbling, and he started the horse with a crack of his whip. The clown, who was looking on, whistled the favorite circus air from Auber's "Cheval du Bronze." Of all the horrible jolting processes I ever went through, riding on a circus pad is about the worst. I can compare it to nothing but riding in a box wagon, without springs, over a series of railroad tracks, laid about six inches apart. And the edge of the pad, too, cuts into the inside of each knee in the most merciless manner. The more I tried to hold on without holding with my hands, the more I was jolted; and, after one round, I determined to try the side-saddle fashion. That was very pleasant till the horse started; but we had not gone five yards before I fell over backward on to the rope inclosing the ring, and great was the fall thereof. But I was not to be beaten by one tumble, and I mounted again, this time with a leg on either side of the horse once more. After I had got round the ring, I thought I would try if it were possible for me to get on to my knees. Instead of jumping up on to both knees at once, in my ignorance, I put the outside knee up first. This was fatal. The horse being in what is called a "slantingdicular" direction—leaning at a considerable angle toward the centre of the ring—my position was a perfectly untenable one, and I was shot with considerable impetus from the horse's back, landing in the sawdust with a thud, to the infinite delight and amusement of the few lookers-on. I think that one experience of circus riding will suffice me for life. It is a profession for which I was evidently never intended. My respect for circus riding, however, as an art, is largely increased by it. "It is not so easy as it looks, you see, Sir," remarked my friendly ring-master, as he brushed the sawdust off me. "People have no idea of the difficulty of attaining a true balance in riding round the ring. The body being out of the perpendicular, the centre of gravity is, of course, an unnatural one, and there is a continual tendency to fall on the inside of the horse. A perfect balance will enable a circus rider of nerve to do almost anything. It is this alteration in the centre of gravity in the body which makes leaping over banners and through hoops so difficult. For this reason: At the moment of springing from the pad, the rider's body is not perpendicular, but in flying through the air the body naturally assumes its proper perpendicular position. The conse-

quence is that unless the rider can instantaneously again accommodate his centre of gravity to that of the running horse, when he descends on his back he must inevitably shoot from the pad into the ring, just the same as a stone bounds away when you drop it on a sloping surface. Otherwise, the leaping in itself is not difficult, provided the horse is well trained and has a regular, even stride. Without an even stride a leap could not be made, for the rider must spring from the pad at the moment the horse rises behind. It is because the horse is out of his regular stride that riders are sometimes compelled to pass under the banners instead of leaping them. You have no conception of the difficulty of circus riding. (I rather thought I had.) Nearly all circus riders are regularly apprenticed in their childhood, and are literally reared to it. I could train a little child to stand up on a running horse in three weeks. But I don't think you could stand up under a year, because of the vast difference between your size and weight and that of a little child." This was to me a pretty clear definition of the main difficulties of circus riding.

My experience of a circus has convinced me of one thing—that from the proprietor down to the lowest supe and stable-man, each and every person connected with



one leads a very hard life and earn every penny they get, and their short nights, their long journeys in a hot sun, over sandy, dusty roads, their processions in the mid-day glare, their thoroughly broken day, must be exceedingly exhausting to the system. There is, too, a considerable mental strain in going through a horseback act in the ring; while the physical exertion of the acrobats, gymnasts and leapers must be something tremendous. And yet, though some of them look worn, they are all as cheery and merry together as possible.

In the late 1860s and the early 1870s, the conversion of many circuses to train travel from horses and wagons eventually led to the enormous expansion of their physical size, which in turn revolutionized virtually every aspect of circus traveling from the clowning to the size of tents. Moving by rail meant wrecks were inevitable, and circuses had their share. While the causes of such disasters were numerous, it's doubtful that any other show train was wrecked from a bridge collapsing on it as happened to John Robinson's.

The Wrecked Menagerie. The Escape of the Serpents, and Birds, and Beasts, *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago, Illinois, 8 July 1872, p. 6. From the New York Sun, July 5.

Old John Robinson's menagerie, aquarium, museum, and circus showed in Bridgeport on Tuesday afternoon and night. After the performance in Bridgeport, the spangles and tights, and gauze, and light, that bewilder the

youthful circus attendant disappeared, and all, from the manager to the stable-boy, began packing preparatory to the move to New Haven.

Tents were struck, beasts housed, and the concern was ready to move by rail. A special train was provided, consisting of one locomotive and twenty-seven platform, box and stock cars, and two passenger coaches. It was 3 o'clock on the morning of the 3rd when the loading was completed.

On the first car, a platform [flat], were six cages, containing the white bear, leopard, hart-beest, and so on. Next was the ticket-wagon, loaded on a platform. After this were more platforms with cages containing one of the best collections of animals that ever took the road.

Then more flats with centre poles and cordage cars with canvas, stock cars with horses and ponies, flats railed upon the sides for the elephant, camels, and other large animals, and last the two passengers cars filled with men. This show employs 220 men, and many of them were scattered along on the flats, stock cars, or boxes, looking out for the animals and guarding the property.

The start was made at 3:30 on Wednesday morning, and a majority of the tired men soon fell asleep, Gil Robinson, the Treasurer, betaking himself to the ticket-wagon to escape the heat and confusion.

Prior to the start, the elevation of the wagon tops was taken, to see whether any were higher than the locomotive's smoke-stack. This is a precaution always taken to insure safety in passing bridges. In this case nothing on the train reached within two inches of the top of the stack.

The train went along safely until it reached a point about two miles distant from New Haven. Here First Avenue intersects the track, the crossing being made by a single-span wooden bridge, of an old-fashioned style. It was just about the gray of the morning when the locomotive and first car passed the bridge safely.

Then a terrible crash awoke every man and beast on the train, and there was a scene of indescribable uproar and confusion. The bridge had fallen on the train. Meanwhile the train was going ahead and the heavy timbers of the bridge were grinding through the ticket wagon and the wagons on the following cars, literally smashing them into fragments.

Gil Robinson was asleep, but he awoke very quickly. The top of his wagon was cut off and forced clear through the Mexican lions' cage. At the same instant the ticket wagon was nearly pulverized, even its desks and other furniture sharing the same fate, and the fragments were hurled a distance of fifteen feet. Mr. Robinson miraculously escaped with a few slight bruises.

The lions set up a roar, and their cage was hurled from the car, singularly escaping comparatively unharmed. Next was the zebra cage. This was smashed to splinters, and the zebra, severely wounded and wild with pain, made for the open country.

Next came the monkey cages. The train was still moving, and the falling bridge timbers still crunching up the cages. There were fifty monkeys in the cages, which were smashed to atoms. Fourteen monkeys were crushed between pieces of wood, or run over by the cars, among the last being crazy Charley, a monkey as large as a 2-

year-old boy. A few monkeys clung to the ruins, but nearly all, chattering and scampering with fear and pain, sprang from the wreck, bounded up the embankment, some perching on fence rails, and then all scampering for trees, many of them clinging to the branches of apple or cherry trees, and wildly scattering the fruit.

The cage containing the cassowary, white pea-fowls, and other rare birds was crushed to atoms, and the birds escaped. The cage with the parrots, macaws, cockatoos, silver and gold pheasants, and the vulture was also crushed. Many of the birds, including the vulture, flew to the woods, the parrots and others filling the air with their unearthly screams.

In the variety cage was the tapir, which was badly hurt.



Gil Robinson in the window of ticket wagon probably lost in Robinson train wreck in 1872. Pfening Archives.

The copia barra [capybara] also sustained injuries, and its cage was hurled from the car. The tank cage, containing the sea lion had its front staved in. The seal set up a frightful barking, adding materially to the discordant chorus of howling beasts, screaming birds, and shouting men.

The front of the sea lion's cage was staved in, and it is feared that the sea lion is injured internally, for he has been in a torpid state ever since. This is the biggest sea lion ever brought to this country. It is well known in San Francisco, where it was exhibited for years, and acquired the name of Ben Butler.

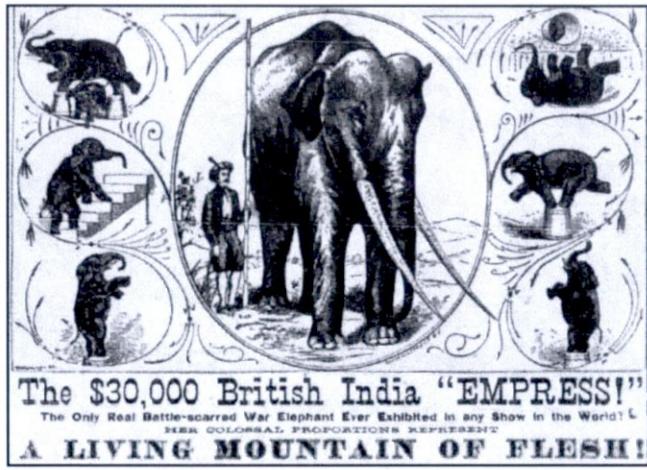
The front and back of the cage containing the harte-beest and the African antelopes were smashed, but the animals escaped unharmed. A great rent was made in the cage of the Bengal tiger, which is one of the fine and most vigorous specimens in the country. With a fierce roar the tiger bounded for the opening. Equally prompt was a man, who threw a plank over the gap and sprang upon it to keep it down. Other men were summoned and after a desperate struggle, the beast was chained to this cage.

Another lion cage was broken, and the beasts made frantic efforts to escape, all the time howling vigorously. Men rushed to the ground and nailed planks over the gaps.

The alligator and snake cage was broken open, and

some snakes were lost, among them a boa constrictor twelve feet long, which is probably hiding in the West Haven woods. The ostrich cage was shivered, but the ostrich was secured, after a long search.

Several other cages remain uninjured, and the horses escaped almost unharmed, as did the heavy curiosities. Of the last is the big elephant Empress, which was greatly agitated. Just after the shock Empress began knocking down the other beasts in its car. One after another the poor camels went down under terrific strokes from the elephant's trunk. Then Empress dealt a felling blow to the buffalo, laid out the three-horned ox, and finished by knocking down the only animal then left standing, the



sacred ox.

They lay in heaps about the floor of the car, while Empress still slashed her trunk wildly about, apparently regretting that there were no more beasts to conquer. Among other animals which escaped were the tapir, a silver lion, the ichneumon, and the copiabarra [capybara].

The scene above described occupied less than a minute, and all the men were promptly out and at work under the direction of Manager John Robinson, Jr., and Assistant Manager James D. Robinson. The first work to do was to secure the fiercer animals, and then the business of hunting up the escaped lion.

Three or four men started for the zebra, found him, and after a sharp fight, got hold of him and shouted for a rope. The zebra wrenched away before the rope was brought, but after another chase he was captured and tied to a telegraph pole. The cassowary was captured after it had kicked down one man, who attempted to seize it. This bird was badly scraped on the back. Many of the minor birds were not even to be seen, and the monkeys threw apples, cherries and defiance at their pursuers.

Only a few of the monkeys were caught, but those captured included one of the largest and most valuable, Wallace, which was brought in after a lively fight. Charles McCarty, the lame man, limped back to the wrecked train with a valuable turtle, which was ascertained to be a native of a near-by swamp. Jim Homer, who weighs 480 pounds, tried to catch a monkey. He didn't. Leo, who is the spryest man in the caravan, tried to

catch a sloth, but failed.

The search went on until nearly all the animals had been recaptured. Many strange birds (including the vulture), the twelve-foot anaconda, and twenty-three monkeys and a few curious snakes, remain at large and they will doubtless add to the comfort of the people in West Haven and neighborhood. Several animals and a few birds died after the arrival at New Haven, including a South American river hog, a boa constrictor, a sloth, and a cassowary. A fine seal is among the animals injured which are despaired of.

The inhabitants of West Haven were terribly awakened by the unusual and fearful uproar. Many closed their doors in dismay, and others, some in their night clothes, rushed to the scene. Among those early on the ground was Dr. Shepard, who rendered all possible professional aid and attempted to sew up the wound in the zebra's back. But the needle broke and the zebra's back went unmended. One excited townsman hurried after the ostrich with a pitchfork, but when the ostrich turned on him the man with the pitchfork incontinently fled.

After securing such animals as could be found, the work of clearing the down track was begun. It was found that the bridge had been utterly swept away. Nothing but the abutments remained, and the huge timbers mixed with the debris of wagons, were strewn along the track for rods. Eight wagons were totally wrecked. Even the felloes and spokes of the wheels were splintered to fragments, utterly impossible to put together, and they were heaped by the side of the track.

On examination it was ascertained that the bridge timbers were old and rotten. Two ice wagons passed over it just before the arrival of the train, and it is thought that their weight so shook the bridge as to cause its fall, unfortunately at the time the train was under it. The bridge was evidently wholly unsafe, and the circus company will take steps to recover from the town of West Haven. The total damage is estimated at \$45,000. No insurance.

When order was restored, it was found that many men had been wounded. Several men were buried in the ruins, but all escaped with nothing more serious than broken or bruised limbs.

There was some excitement in West Haven last night. Sleep was disturbed by the chattering of the monkeys which spent the night in talking and throwing green apples at each other, and the inhabitants were also in constant fear that they might receive a visit from the vulture, or that the anaconda would call to bid them good morning.

Pickpockets, thieves, short-change specialists, counterfeiters and gamblers were among the least welcomed and most commonplace visitors on circus day. Some shows claimed they did not sanction the



I Made Myself So Useful That They Gave Me an Interest in One of the Shell Games

crooks, but were unable to keep them at bay. This was often a specious argument, and is probably the case in the following example. Circuses regularly sold the privilege, as it was called, to allow thieves and gamblers to travel with the show. Shows routinely short changed ticket buyers, and passing counterfeit money to unsuspecting patrons frequently occurred. Pickpockets, however, tended to be free lancers as the operators of other scams did not want concern about their wallets to put circus goers on guard against other activities. It was, in fact, not unknown for gamblers to run pickpockets off the circus lot. In other instances, shows were unable to rid themselves of nefarious camp followers. In the late nineteenth century America was full of confidence men who practiced their art wherever there was a crowd, at fairs, parades, lynchings, railroad stations, and circuses. Some troupes, often the bigger ones, hired detectives or used their own broad-shouldered personnel to run them off.

L. B. Lent's 1873 tear through Wisconsin was well documented by The Janesville Gazette. Weeks after Lent left town, the paper charged that a De Haven, presumably George W., not Lewis B. Lent, was in charge of the show, and further, De Haven had made restitution for the thieves associated with his circus the previous year, proof that the circus was in on the illegal activities from the get-go. William Slout's Olympians of the Sawdust Circle shows De Haven having the privileges on the Lent Circus in 1873, further evidence that he masterminded the law breaking.

Lewis B. Lent, circus owner. Pfening Archives.

Lent's Circus, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 18 July 1873, p. 4

This long looked for combination of wonders arrived here this morning on a special train from Monroe and made an excellent street parade about half past ten o'clock. Their display of animals and other curiosities, and their ring performance this afternoon, were all that we have been led to expect from the excellent reputation of the company and the many favorable notices they have received. The evening entertainment will begin about half past seven in their tents near the C. & N. W. freight depot.

Attempted Robberies, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 18 July 1873, p. 4.

Yesterday afternoon, about two o'clock, during the absence of the bookkeeper, E. B. Moses, two strangers entered the office of Morse, Hanson & Co., on the race, and attempted to open the money drawer. Returning suddenly, Mr. Moses found the two men in the office, but as they were busily engaged in figuring on some cards as he entered, he did not consider their presence any cause for suspicion of the evil intent, it being a common practice for wholesale customers to do their figuring at the office desk. The two men remained a short time in the office and then leisurely departed, asking Mr. Moses where the



drinking water was kept. Nothing more was thought of their presence until at night when Mr. Moses went to the money drawer and discovered that it had been tampered with, though the thieves had not succeeded in opening it. Then certain strange actions on the part of his afternoon visitors occurred to him and he came to the conclusion that they were the guilty ones. This morning, about the time the circus began the parade, Mr. Moses noticed this same couple pass his office, examining the premises closely as they walked by in the direction of the dam. Watching them he saw them enter Crossett & Clark's mill office at the head of the race, and he notified Ole Evenson of the firm of Morse, Hanson & Co. of the fact. It seems that Crossett & Clark's office was temporarily vacant and their safe open. The thieves quickly broke open the several drawers in the safe, but as there was no money there, their efforts went unrewarded. The approach of Mr. Newman from the mill adjoining induced the couple to leave the office and they started up River street, under the railroad bridge, and made hasty steps northward. About this time Mr. Evenson reached the mill office and gave chase to the retreating thieves. Persevering in his pursuit, he captured them near the cemetery and asked a man who was passing to assist him in holding them until assistance could be procured. But he declined and Mr. Evenson was compelled to let the men go. They made good their escape and are still at large. These roughs evidently travel along with Lent's circus and take advantage of the crowds present wherever it exhibits to ply their unlawful vocation. We hear that a Monroe bank was yesterday relieved of \$250 by the light fingered sneaks who took advantage of circus enthusiasm to reap a harvest. Characters of this sort will hang on the skirts of the most carefully managed traveling exhibition of any magnitude, and it will be well for our citizens to keep a little watch on their property tonight.

Brief Items, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 19 July 1873, p. 4.

Our police force was on the streets nearly all night, watching for more thieves, burglars or pickpockets.

It is rather annoying when a person goes under a tier of a circus seats to thrash an impudent fellow for taking inexcusable liberties, to have the crowd suddenly seized with the impression that the avenging youth is the real offender and that it is a proper thing to do to send in a man to put a head on him.

Yesterday's Police Captures, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 19 July 1873, p. 4.

As was expected, the arrival of Lent's circus brought a gang of lawless hangers on who have been committing depredations with good success to the various Wisconsin cities where this traveling exhibition has pitched its tents. We do not wish to be understood that these men were in any way connected with Lent's circus or that the manag-

er or proprietor in any manner sanction their presence. They have simply been endured because they could not be shaken off. Traveling on their own responsibility, they would arrange their movements to conform to the various appointments of the circus company and whenever a halt was made they were among the first on the ground and were not at all dilatory about entering upon the thieving operations which constituted their daily and nightly calling. Educated to their unlawful avocation in large cities, where the utmost precautions are ever taken to guard against the operations of thieves of every grade, their skill, experience and daring, gained in difficult and dangerous fields of labor, has rendered them particularly successful in the comparatively unguarded country towns which were so unfortunate as to be subjected to their visits. It has been a sort of a summer vacation to these till tapping, skull cracking gentry—this trip into the rural districts, and they have combined pleasure with profit to so great an extent that, should the parties captured prove to be guilty, there is no reason why they should mourn over the little stroke of ill fortune which has thrown them into the hands of the Janesville police and may give them a temporary resting place inside the walls of the state reformatory institution at Waupan.

Our officers were apprised at the presence of the advance guard of a gang of operators on the night before the arrival of the circus. Various bold and successful robberies committed in Racine and Monroe were cited as reasons why the thieving crew should be apprehended and brought into the subduing influence of hand cuffs and iron bars. Then there was an expectation that they would attempt a repetition of their previous practice at the expense of our citizens. So the police officers of Janesville were forewarned and forearmed against expected depredations. The firm of Elkins & Co., jewelers, of Racine, had been robbed of some eight hundred dollars worth of goods by a couple of men who entered their store and stole valuable articles in the presence of one of the proprietors and a clerk and carried off their plunder in their pockets without being detected. A member of that firm was here yesterday for the purpose of assisting in the detection and arrest of the thieves. Monroe had also suffered to a considerable extent. The following telegram, received by us this morning, explains their operations at the latter place:

Monroe, July 19th.—Thursday, while Lent's circus was here several robberies and thefts were committed by an organized gang of pickpockets and sneak thieves, followers of the show. Among the victims are the First National Bank, the officers of which being at dinner, the thief entered by a rear window and gobbled about \$150 in fractional currency which was all that was left outside the safes. Starr, Johnson & Co., while out of their warehouse, lost about \$70 from the till, some one having glided in and out with the booty. Mr. Johnson had changed a five dollar bill a short time before, for one of the circus men, as he thinks. A servant girl at the United States hotel where some of the troupe stopped last lost a gold chain worth about twelve dollars. Mr. A. Strelf had his pocket picked of thirty dollars in money and seventy dollars in notes, just after buying his ticket. Other cases of loss by having pockets picked near or in the tents are reported,

but names or amounts not learned. From the check displayed by the dealers in the lemonade and the prize packages inside the main tents, it is thought by many here that they are of them.

On Thursday afternoon in this city, an attempt was made to open the money drawer in the office of Morse, Hanson & Co., and the safe in Crossett & Clark's mill office was broken into, both of which operations were explained in yesterday's Gazette. Meanwhile our officers had spotted their men, seven in number, and were busily at work endeavoring to accomplish their arrest. While the whole police force was scattered in various portions of the city, watching and stirring up things generally, officer Wheeler hung about the depot and the territory adjacent to the circus grounds. Just previous to the departure of the M. & St. P. train for Milton Junction he discovered three of the individuals whom he was searching for, evidently preparing to take a little trip by rail northward. Securing the assistance of John Albright, he accomplished the arrest of the trio and shortly afterwards two more of the gang were rooted out and brought under subjection by officers Wheeler and Carman, the latter having arrived in time to lend his aid. In accomplishing these arrests the officers were materially assisted by the attaches of Lent's circus, who were also of valuable assistance in pointing out suspected parties. The squad of five were placed in an omnibus and conveyed to jail. In the meantime the two individuals who had gone through Crossett & Clark's safe in the forenoon, and were afterwards followed northward by Ole Evenson, had made their way through the woods to the river, procured a boat and crossed the stream some two miles above the city. Reaching the railroad crossing a couple of miles north of here they got aboard the C. & N. W. passenger train, which always halts at that point, and proceeded to Milton Junction, where they purchased tickets for Chicago, via Janesville. Conductor Rock, of the Janesville and Milton accommodation, learning of their contemplated movements, immediately telegraphed the facts to this city and several officers were at the depot when the down train for Chicago arrived. Search was made in the cars for the two men and one of them was finally discovered by officer Wheeler in the water closet of the ladies' car and his arrest accomplished. His companion succeeded in hiding from the officers and was not taken. The names of the men captured and now held in jail are given as: G. L. Wilson, F. Barton, James Carter, Charles Grovesner, Charles O'Brien and William Haufman. Wilson is identified as one of the men who attempted to operate in Morse, Hanson & Co.'s office and afterwards broke into Crossett & Clark's safe. An officer from Racine who is in town thinks that O'Brien is one of the men interested in the jewelry store robbery in that city. The entire squad were before Police Justice Smith this morning and had their examination adjourned to Wednesday of next week. In default of five hundred dollars bail each they were remanded to jail.

Yesterday was a good day for arrests and our police force, one and all, deserve the highest credit for their untiring efforts and the excellent management of their duties. With but little time to work up a plan of operations and with meagre descriptions of the men they were

expected to hunt out in the crowd of strangers that thronged the city, they have accomplished their work so well that but a single man of the squad escaped. Daniel McDougall and John Albright, ex-members of the police force, were on special duty yesterday and rendered efficient aid.

The Credit Belongs Here, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 21 July 1873, p. 4.

The Janesville correspondent of the Chicago Times, in his telegram to that paper from this city, on Friday last, in reference to the haul of the thieves made by our police, says:

"An officer from Racine was here and with the aid of officers here, he arrested and lodged in jail six men."

The truth is that the officer from Racine did not arrive until 12:30 o'clock on Saturday morning, the day after the gang was taken, and he came then in response to a telegram to the effect that the arrest had been made. As Janesville officers did the whole work, they are entitled to the credit. The fact that a reward was offered for the Racine thieves makes our officers feel more anxious for the recognition of their claims. The Times correspondent should correct his statement.

Circus Followers, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 23 July 1873, p. 1.

Lent's circus has been followed by a gang of sharpers and thieves. At Janesville these rascals were closely hunted by the police. Six of a supposed band of seven were caught. Two policemen came from that city to Madison on Saturday n the hope of taking in the other man, but failed to do so.

From the tracks left in this city, nothing is surer than that the uncaught scamps are yet quite numerous, and we think the proprietors of this show had better interest themselves in the detection of these supernumeraries, if they wish to maintain the popularity of their exhibition.

Two thefts were committed in this city on Saturday. Some men entered the office of Bunker & Vroman at their lumber yard and divested their drawer of \$15 in greenbacks while the proprietors were out or had their backs turned. During the same day, Mrs. Borchsemus, wife of the Capital house proprietor, had her gold watch stolen from her room in the hotel.

It is barely possible that the persons who committed these thefts are not followers of the circus, but are dead beats who stay among us and who did the stealing, knowing that the circus followers would get the credit for it.—Madison Journal.

The Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Wisconsin, 23 July 1873, p. 1.

Several successful robberies were committed in Milwaukee on Monday in broad daylight, by parties sup-

posed to be traveling with Lent's circus. The sufferers are H. Lendrickson, commission merchant, at 128 Reed street, and Charles Schlitz, liquor merchant, at 425 Chesnut street. The former lost \$200 in money and a draft for \$198, and the latter \$53.

The Examination of the Six Men Arrested Last Friday. *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 23 July 1873, p. 4.

The six men arrested last Friday on suspicion of their connection with the various robberies, burglaries, etc., committed at Racine, Monroe and Janesville, were examined before police justice Smith today. The examination resulted in the discharge of F. Barton, James Carter, Charles Grovner, Charles O'Brien and Wm. Haufman. They were, however, immediately re-arrested by officers from Monroe and Racine and committed to jail to await the departure of trains for those places, when they will be taken away. G. L. Wilson, tried upon the charge of burglarizing Crossett & Clark's office, was held for trial and remanded to jail in default of \$500 bail. Winans & Dixon were attorneys for the defendants, while District Attorney Norcross conducted the prosecution.

Only One Held for Trial, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 30 July 1873, p. 4.

By the following item from the Green County Republican it will be seen that three out of the four suspected men sent from this city to Monroe were discharged from custody on examination:

Four fellows supposed to have been connected with robbing the bank and other deviltries were brought up from Janesville and examined on Saturday before Justice Abbott. The entire legal force from the oldest to the youngest were engaged by the suspected chaps, and District Attorney Douglas had to "go it alone" in his efforts to convict them. The contest was a sharp one but "Dug" succeeded in pinning one fellow by the name of James Carter, who as the testimony went to show, got his hand into juxtaposition with Mr. Strelf's pocket on the show ground. The Justice held him to bail in the sum of \$300, and on default he was sent down to Mr. Derrick's to stay until the next session of the circuit court.

The Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Wisconsin, 31 July 1873, p. 1.

A man giving the name of Charles Leslie was arrested at Oshkosh at 2 o'clock on Sunday morning while in the act of robbing the money drawer of P. McDonale's grocery in that city. He was sent to jail in default of \$1000 bail. Two other suspicious characters seen in Leslie's company on Saturday were arrested, but there was not sufficient evidence to hold them. This is probably part of



the gang that has been traveling with Lent's circus.

The "Lent" Circus Ruffians, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 7 August 1873, p. 1.

The La Crosse Democrat says of the camp followers of the "Lent" concern:

"The crowd of hangers on about the circus was the worst set of Bowery roughs that could be picked up. From the time the people arrived at the outside of the canvas they found that they were in a crowd of swindlers. Twenty-five cents a glass was charged for sweetened water lemonade. As soon as they arrived inside they were met by impudent loafers who thrust candy into the hands of the ladies, saying that they were entitled to it, and then forced the escorts of the ladies to pay four prices for the stuff. All through the performance the audience was basely insulted by these highway robbers, and had it not been for the delicacy people have of getting into a row in a crowd some of the miserable slinks would have been half killed. Mr. Lent has always before this had gentlemanly assistants, but this year he has fallen from grace fearfully. He cannot fail to be cognizant of the outrages his agents perpetrate on people that patronize him, and his excellent performance cannot atone for the insults heaped upon Mr. Lent's respectable audiences. If this is the last appearance of Lent's Circus in this part of the country, it may be well to make all the money that is possible, and to leave an impression of disgust behind, but if the circus ever comes here again, the people have got to have a certificate that the roughs have been left at home, or there will not be an audience sufficient to pay for the oats which the ponies eat. The most that we have said here is calculated for the benefit of Mr. Lent."

That is all true as gospel, every word of it, but as the "Lent" circus is owned by a man by the name of De Haven, perhaps it would be well to speak to him about it. He don't seem to have much regard for the feelings of respectable people, though.

The Circus Highwaymen. From the *LaCrosse Liberal Democrat*, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 14 August 1873, p. 1.

The Lent circus is being abused by the papers everywhere, for the gang of highway thieves that accompany it. It is suggested by the *Janesville Gazette* that Lent has nothing to do with it, but that De Haven runs it. If such is the case, that accounts for the robbery; for De Haven always has with him a gang of thieves and gamblers, and when they are caught, and money has to be refunded that has been stolen, the money is paid out of the ticket wagon, showing that the management is in partnership with the thieves. We know this, because last year we collected over two hundred dollars from De Haven's agent which was stolen at Portage by thieves connected with the show. The *Winona [Minnesota] Herald* says of Lent's circus:

"The crowd of rough and sneak thieves which accompanied it, must be about the worst characters New York can furnish for a western tour. Disreputable tricks of the meanest conception were practiced to cheat those in attendance out of a small pittance. The hucksters connected with this circus seem to be a band of petty snatch-

thieves, and as they peddle their small wares, they wholesale and retail such bits of profanity as would bring the blush to the cheek of the Algerian pirate, and their Billingsgate [profane] vocabulary would shame the oldest female fish monger in London. Lent may be a gentleman himself—and his circus a good one—but if he intends to make many more trips into Minnesota he needs to make out a new pay roll, and purge his menagerie of those two legged hyenas in human form."

Circuit Court—Judge Conger, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 25 November 1873, p. 4

George L. Wilson, one of the Lent circus gang of thieves, convicted of burglary on the office of Crosett & Clark, in this city, was sentenced to eight months at hard labor in the state prison.

Anti-circus bias had both a moral and an economic basis. Papers often complained about circuses taking cash out of town, which was a serious problem in an era in which the money supply was often inadequate, especially in small towns where commerce was insular. In this case the George F. Bailey Circus was guilty of the additional sin of having a lousy menagerie.

The Cedar Rapids Times, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 31 July 1873, p. 3.

Not less than five thousand dollars were taken out of the city by Bailey's Circus—and this, too, when churches are mortgaged, the city borrowing money and everybody complaining of "hard times!" As a circus, this was a passably fair concern, but as a first class menagerie it was a fraud—there being just enough animals to take the "cuss" off the circus and induce preachers, deacons and serious families to attend with all their little folks. The riding, acrobatic, gymnastic performances came fully up to the bills, but the zoological department failed by a very great many animals, reptiles and birds.

Negative reviews were less common than positive ones, but not unknown. This scathing criticism of John O'Brien's Barnum Circus was about as bad as it got.

O'Brien's "Barnum" Exhibition, *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, Ticonderoga, New York, 13 June 1874, p. 2.

This circus and menagerie gave its exhibition in Brandon, Monday, which we attended and have the privilege of judging. The display of animals was not large, but some among them were of much interest, such as the rhinoceros and sea lion. Some of the circus riding was good. The clown would be discreditable to an ordinary "nigger show." The men, horses, mules, etc., looked rough and miserable. It being advertised so extensively as the "mightiest pageant earth has ever seen," giving the idea that it was bigger than Barnum's caravan of last year, the spectators had reason to pronounce it a fraud.

From statements made by the showmen and by citizens who had before seen O'Brien's menagerie, and from the fact that O'Brien was with the company, it is universally believed to be the circus formerly known as O'Brien's.

The Rutland *Globe* says, and we heartily endorse the statement, that "the whole show lacked in amount of entertainment and real talent, a lack which could not be filled by the few really good performers. It is generally

reported and believed that the show belongs to O'Brien, who has purchased the right to use Barnum's name. This may not be true, but all the facts bear up the report." The Herald's opinion is to the same effect, though more guardedly expressed.

We cannot understand why P.T. Barnum allows his name to be used in connection with such a show, after reaching so high a point, as it will only have the effect to injure him in popular estimation. Hitherto, he has been held in high esteem, which must certainly be lessened by allowing his name to be used under false pretenses.

Rioting of all kinds was far more prevalent in nineteenth century America than today. In fact, the July 1863 New York draft riot, a political and race uprising, was the worst insurrection in our history. Recreational rioting, another popular variety of civil unrest, was widespread on circus grounds as disputes between towners and showmen, frequently exacerbated by alcohol, often turned violent. While the ostensive cause of the fights was a poor performance, a clown's joke, a loss in a shell game, and a score of other reasons, one eminent scholar has sagaciously observed that the underlying source of show ground carnage "was mainly frustration at the dull lives the village folk lived."

Riot at a Circus, *The Daily Constitution*, Middletown, Connecticut, 8 July 1874, p. 3.

St. John, N. B. July 7.

A serious riot occurred in Fredericton last night on the occasion of the performance of Lent's circus. A large number of lumbermen were present and some dispute arising at the ticket office on the subject of change, a row took place which ended in the circus people drawing revolvers and firing among the crowd. This, instead of intimidating, only served to increase the anger of those present, and as fast as those wounded were carried away others took their places till the circus people were overpowered and some of their wagons run into the river. At this time the riot assumed an alarming aspect. The fire bells rung and the mayor, with a body of special constable hastily sworn in, after some trouble, succeeded in clearing the ground. Thirteen of the circus men were arrested. It being rumored this morning that the circus was about to leave for St. Stephen, a large body of lumbermen assembled at the station, threatening to tear up the rails. An injunction from the supreme court, however, being served in time the circus was detained until a full investigation can be made. Much excitement prevails over the affair.

While the great era of anti-circus religious sentiment ended around the time of the Civil War, a whiff of it stayed in the air through the early twentieth century. The first account exemplifies the staying power of the attitude that circus people were slightly immoral and lacking in religious conviction. The second documents the survival of strong anti-circus attitudes. The third expresses the ambivalence of the pious toward field shows while the last details one way in which showmen attempted to defuse anti-circus feelings.

Life of a Female Circus-Rider, *South Side Signal*, Babylon, Long Island, New York, 11 July 1874, p. 1.

A young woman who rides horseback in a circus has

communicated her biography to a reporter of the Baltimore American, who publishes its mysteries.

She appears, by his report, to be more refined than [Charles Dickens's character] Miss Josephine Sleary and her associates in "Hard Times," and she certainly earns a larger salary in a month than the lady who married the celebrated [Dickens character in Hard Times] Mr. E. W. B. Childers did in a year. The reporter describes her as a "young and pretty girl, with an innocent, artless manner, but with a quiet consciousness that she is able to take care of herself; dressed very elegantly in a black velvet basque and a silk dress, made in the finest style, and with very little jewelry about her."

She is the daughter of a celebrated circus-rider who was formerly the leading attraction at Astley's; receives one hundred and fifty dollars a week; in nineteen months has only fallen from her horse twice; had her arm broken in two place, long ago, by a fall; designs all her own costumes, and thinks that French female riders as a class have the most reckless abandon, but English women most endurance.

The reporter inquired whether circus people have any "religious feeling," and was told in reply that jumping through hoops did not prevent her from trying to do good, and that she was a member of a church and in good standing.

St. Louis Christian Advocate, St. Louis, Missouri, 29 May 1878, p. 1.

The Presbytery of Cincinnati has passed resolutions against going to theatres, circuses and halls, and also saying that Presbyterians must not dance nor play cards. These resolutions further lament the prevalence of "hill-top and suburban resorts" where beer is sold and Sunday is desecrated.

Wilkes-Barre Times, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 3 October 1878, p. 1.

After considering the question all winter we come to the conclusion every spring that the circus is immoral; but then the bill poster comes along with the big pictures, and our mind changes. As we gaze at the lions, tigers and monkeys, and think that nature made all of them, we are not sure. And when we look at the beautiful young lady, with nothing on but a blue ribbon around her waist, with one leg pointing to six o'clock and the other to high noon, and think that nature made her, too, just as she was except the ribbon, we begin to lean up to the circus. But when the brass band begins to play and the elephants go round, we rush for a front seat to get in ahead of the ministers, who always wear stovepipe hats and won't sit down in front.

The Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Wisconsin, 28 April 1879, p. 4.

Burr Robbins has generously invited the officers and the members of the several Sunday schools of the city to visit his menagerie next Friday afternoon. The various ministers and superintendents are to give the children brief addresses concerning some of the animals. The children will greatly appreciate this chance to see the animals, and many a boy and girl will now wish they had

been attending some Sunday school for a year past.

Circus advance agents routinely cut deals with editors that included, in addition to the displays ads, the insertion of "readers," short or sometimes not so short items praising the coming exhibition. These readers came in two varieties, both of which gave the impression of being news stories while in fact they were another expression of the show's advertising. In the first type, a rave review from earlier in the season was provided to the editor. In the second, the merits of the upcoming extravaganza were exaggerated or fabricated in a prepared article written by the show's press agent. In some cases, a number of stories were collected together into what were called Press Books, allowing the editor to choose among several pieces. Both styles of readers were part of the advertising package negotiated between the advance agent and the newspaper man. A few compulsively honest editors gave away the game by placing a small "adv." at the end of such articles, which must have caused press agents no end of agitation.

Murray's Circus, *South Side Signal*, Babylon, Long Island, New York, 3 October 1874, p. 3.

Murray's circus gave two performances in this city yesterday, both of which were largely attended. Without going into detail we can characterize the ring performance as the best we have witnessed in this city in a number of years. Mr. Murray advertised that two female riders would appear, and two female riders did appear, and good ones too. One of the principle features was the riding of Mr. Wood Cook, and we do not hesitate in saying that he was fully equal, if not superior, to the so-called champion of the world, James Robinson. Certainly there was greater variety in his performance. The entertainment throughout was a thoroughly good one. We had almost forgotten to mention Miss Mille Turnour, the so-called "Queen of the Air." Her trapeze performance was simply wonderful. The circus is managed by Mr. Murray individually. He appears as ring master and assumes full control. There was not a word or act said or done to offend anybody. Two performances will be given to-day. Do not fail to see this exhibition, for it is well worthy of the best patronage.—Albany Argus

Murray's Circus will exhibit in Babylon, Monday afternoon and evening. Oct. 5th.

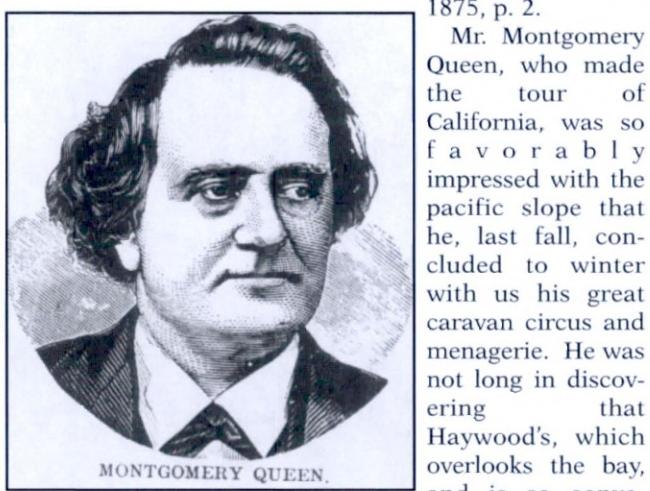
P. T. Barnum's, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 4.

Own and only greatest show on earth which will reach Eau Claire by three monster special trains of his own solid steel cars on Monday, July 16, by far the most stupendous amusement enterprise ever projected. Half a million dollars' worth of foreign features added the present year, including Barnum's Scriptural Behemoth, the only living hippopotamus this side of the Atlantic, a stud of six most magnificently beautiful "Trakene" trick stallions, which cost Mr. B \$30,000 gold, in Paris, and for whose equals in either appearance or intelligence \$50,000 is freely offered, Capt. Costentenus, the remarkable and sole survivor of Tartar Chinese barbarity, whose person is covered, literally from head to foot, with tattooing, and for half as skillfully illustrated a being as him \$50,000 will be paid; Miss Hengler's original and daunt-

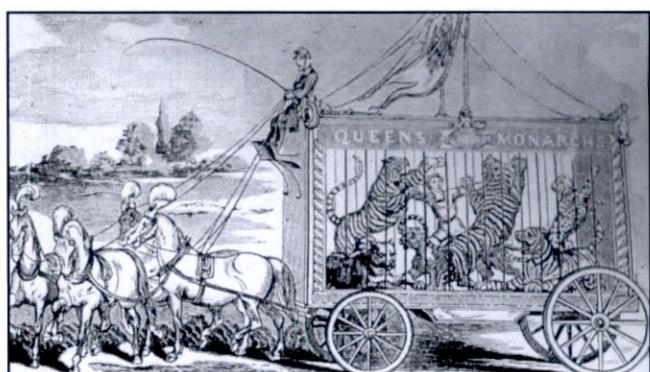
less \$50,000 challenge double ménage act, with her two superb stallions, and Charles W. Fish, the chief among the bareback equestrian champions. And all this but an inkling of what is to be seen.

Circuses were news even when they weren't on the road. This winter quarters tour of the Montgomery Queen Circus headquarters in Haywood, California was typical of such accounts. The reporter's credulity is apparent in his reference to the Hogapottamus, and his casual comment that Queen's giraffe was the only one ever in America.

A Caravan—Circus and Menagerie in Winter Quarters, *Weekly Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, Colorado, 14 April 1875, p. 2.



Mr. Montgomery Queen, who made the tour of California, was so favorably impressed with the pacific slope that he, last fall, concluded to winter with us his great caravan circus and menagerie. He was not long in discovering that Haywood's, which overlooks the bay, and is so conveniently near to the city of San Francisco, just the spot to lay off and rest from the fatigues of several months of excitement and travel incident to show life. In one large building, two hundred feet in length and sixty in width, is arranged on both sides plain, warm, but very secure cages and stalls for the animals. As you enter the door, in an apartment about thirty feet square heavily planked and belted, stands Lallah Rookh, the mammoth Asiatic war elephant, weighing about five tons. By the kind invitation of Mr. A.J. Forepaugh, we step within the enclosure, and contrast our diminutive figure with that of the mountain of flesh. Mr. Forepaugh insists that she is kind, and that there is no possible danger, but the immense yellow bulldog crouching away off in one corner, seemed to say, "Look out, stranger!" We took the hint and walked off remarking that we were not selfish and Forepaugh might enjoy the entire visit with his pet. Our next was a



row of double-humped camels and dromedaries, "ships of the desert," some very small ponies, and two trick mules, quietly munching their hay, apparently unconcerned, and unconscious that strangers were present. We next passed to the enclosure containing the white Japanese and Chinese peacocks, looking remarkably fine, and strutting about as if they were anxiously awaiting the opening of the sawdust season. The ouadad [?], a new addition, a horned nondescript, which slightly puzzled our knowledge of natural history to locate among the hooved ruminating quadrupeds is in the collection. A fine feathered ostrich from the desert of Sahara, and a splendid Australian emu, next attracted attention. They seemed much at home, and rather appreciate their position.

The young snow-white sacred zebu, an object of worship by the hindoe (sic) evidently does not recognize his importance. We rather contrasted his present quarters to those luxurious apartments he would occupy in Hindustan, if he were only there; for it must be remembered that a white zebu is very rare, and consequently made doubly sacred to those ex-worshipping heathens. Passing on, our attention was called to the performing guanacos, or llamas, of Peru. The animal performs in the ring. A huge South American condor seemed to go one eye upon us, as he complacently rested upon an immense perch. This is the bird which we, in our boyish days, innocently believed "was not well," when he didn't fly up to the sun every morning before breakfast, to strengthen his optics. The immense spiral-horned African eland and a rare animal, was browsing away in one corner, evidently enquiring, "in his mind," if he should enjoy the salubrious climate of our golden state next winter. A large assemblage, a regular congress of monkeys, apes and baboons, seemed to be loudly discussing some appropriation bill or investigating some gigantic ring swindle, of the ring-tailed monkeys among them. The genuine Barbara zebra, the most beautifully marked animal we ever looked upon in any collection was interviewed. He is a round, plump, good-natured beast. It is the intention of Mr. Queen to have him educated so as to perform numerous tricks in the ring. The pink-eyed albino deers engaged our attention for a moment. They are white as the beautiful snow, small, prettily formed, have wide-spreading antlers, and are perfectly untamable. Next in order was a majestic Royal Bengal tiger, who gave a sleepy, sly yawn as we halted in front of his cage, exhibiting his capacious open jaws, tusks and molars. He looked like a bad crowd. Adjoining was a tawny African lioness, a doting parent of four young cubs, scarcely larger than a full grown tomcat. These little fellows exhibited their natural savage ferociousness, and crept behind their dam, who suspiciously eyed and growled at us, as we surveyed the group. A beautifully spotted Senegal leopard was the sole occupant of the next iron-grated apartment, an immense Abyssinian lion, said to be from the collection of the late lamented King Theodore, nervously moved around and about his den; and the little history of Daniel was most vividly recalled, and we refreshed our memory, as we stood gazing at the great king of the forest. A host of birds comprising about all of the pretty feathered tribe, chattered and flew excitedly about, and it

naturally occurred to us, what a great fool our weak, but worthy progenitor, Adam, was to listen to Eve. Had he not done so, we might have remained in the Garden of Eden and listened to the little songsters and forever feasted our eyes upon the beautiful plumaged birds, instead of now patronizing Montgomery Queen's extensive aviary. A large Brazilian tiger, handsomely covered with spots of deep brown and gold, came in for his share of admiration. Then the wonderful Hogapottamus; from the blue river Nile of upper Nubia, was duly surveyed. This is a marvelous wonder, and will, without doubt, attract much attention this season. The giant and Australian kangaroos stood before us like two great prize fighters. Another den with an African lioness and three handsome, playful cubs peeped through the heavy iron grating upon us. These cubs were born in California, late last fall, and are perfect pets. The capybara is another unique animal for student and lovers of natural history; and which is rarely found in traveling geological gardens. The spotted and striped grave-desecrating, howling hyenas seemed to laugh and mock us, so we innocently inquired of Mr. Queen if his hyenas actually subsisted entirely on human flesh. An apartment is opened for the horned horse of Ethiopia, which is daily expected from Mr. Queen's eastern agents. Colonel Hudson then stepped forward and escorted us to the giraffe or camelopard, certainly the greatest curiosity of all of Mr. Queen's vast collection, and the only animal of its kind ever brought to this country. It stands almost twelve feet high, and is in itself worth a visit from every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. The wallaby, from South America, is a carnivorous beast, bearing a slight resemblance to the kangaroo, but of so savage a nature that he would not hesitate fighting the Bengal tiger. Having killed and eaten up a half dozen monkeys, he languishes in solitary confinement, and sighs for an opportunity of "croaking" somebody. In the moving aquarium a pair of active and healthy sea lions luxuriates. These animals will afford the people in the interior abundant theme for reflection. We next visited the buildings in which were stored the cages, chariots, and wagons, which have been overhauled, repainted, redecorated, and gilded for the approaching season, when Mr. Queen moves through the country, "conquering and to conquer," everything is in the finest condition, and a large number of entirely new cages, built in New York, have been received for the transportation of the giraffe and other new animals which have recently been added to Mr. Queen's vast collection. The ring building, where the horses are practiced and performers made perfect, which is a curiosity in its ways, was the next object of interest that attracted our attention. It is a busy place, where the entire and best circus company in the world was hard at work practicing the most difficult feats, fully intent to carry off the palm of superiority in the grand trial of the saw dust profession this coming season. In an apartment adjoining Queen's new amphitheatre in San Francisco, the wardrobe, banners, insignia and paraphernalia of the richest designs, extravagantly and perfectly showered with gold and silver ornaments, has been entirely reconstructed with an especial view to eclipse any and all previous attempts in show demonstrations.-- San Francisco Call

The 1870s were a time of transition for circuses as the one-ring intimacy of the round top tent began to give way to gigantic hippodrome tracks, massive oblong tents, and worst of all, two rings. The talking clown was replaced by spectacle. Such changes were not universally welcomed as the following short item demonstrates. All institutional change meets resistance and the circus is no exception. This was the beginning of the American circus's Golden Age, and it seems more than a little ironic that this ascent to greatness was considered decadent by some observers. Perhaps in a hundred years some scholar will express bewilderment why Cirque du Soleil wasn't accepted by segments of today's circus community.

Decay of the Legitimate Circus, *The Decatur Republican*, Decatur, Illinois, 17 June 1875, p 4.

"I have lived," sadly remarked the venerable Hunker, "to see the old-fashioned circus done away with. No ring, no sawdust to speak of, no clown, no music, with the band up on the ordinary benches. Instead, an endless sea of canvas, a race track a mile long, more or less; the audience on the other side so far off that the young ruralist of the period may not reach it and call the attention of acquaintances with a shrill whistle; the band in the center of a wilderness; the clown clothed in citizens' dress, and distributing some accidental humor to a select few. The only things I recognize are the peddlers of the familiar peanuts with their unvarying originality; some few spangles, some glasses of lemonade, and a like amount of exaggerated candy, some glaring lights, which, however, are apparently lost in the boundless contiguity of space; some horses, but so much horse that one wonders how it is properly to be taken care of; the intelligent elephant, but too much elephant; the educated monkey, but more monkey than is absolutely necessary.

"It is all good, I grant you, but is there not such a thing as satiety in the way of animal and canvas? It is startling surprise throughout, and good in its way; but what I want to know is, where's the old-fashioned circus? That's what I went forth for to see, and it wasn't there. Ah, sir (young man, a cup o' them peanuts), there must be youngsters around here will never know what it is to see a real circus. Too much of new-fangled notions. Too much mere sensation. Too much novelty and not enough of business. There must be a return to the legitimate, sir, a return to the legitimate."

Criminal activity on circus grounds was so unexceptional that its absence was news. The circus in the following article was Yankee Robinson's, which closed a few days after this article appeared when creditors attached the show. Perhaps if he had the additional sources of revenue provided by "gamblers and confidence men," his circus might have survived.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 26 June 1875 p. 3.

The circus has come and gone, and the crowds that gathered to attend have dispersed, each individual having some memory of the day either pleasant or unpleasant to bear him company in after days. The day passed quietly, the city seeming to have escaped the usual afflictions that the coming of circuses usually bring about. The nest of gamblers and confidence men that usually accompany

shows either failed to put in an appearance, or discreetly kept themselves in the background, and refrained from plying their games. We presume that the company of citizens who brought up the profits of the show have found their investment a good one. At all events we hope they did not lose anything in the venture.

The following article is a reminder how difficult trouping could be, especially when the show moved by horsepower. It also notes the personality traits a successful showman must have.

The Pluck of Burr Robbins, *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 16 August 1875, p. 4.

We have received a letter from the indomitable Burr Robbins, dated Indianola, Iowa, Aug. 11th, which gives some of the hard experience of that wonderful and successful showman. After leaving here on the 30th of May, he experienced nothing but mud and rain, till the 3rd of August. It was discouraging in the extreme, and would have crushed the spirits and broken down the energy of any other man but Burr Robbins. At one time his advanced (sic) agent wanted him to lay by for thirty days, and wait for dry weather and good roads, but Robbins with pluck that is worth a fortune, sent the agent back, and ordered him to run till every horse was dead, and the last of Burr Robbins' show was gone. Obstacles that seemed insurmountable stared him in the face daily. He drove one hundred and fifty miles over the most execrable roads, to cross one river, losing many horses by death, and disabling others. He has finally struck dry weather, good roads, and good luck. On the 11th five thousand people went to Indianola to see the show, and that while Barnum was within fifteen miles of the place. He says he is going to make for Missouri again and is bound to shout "Eureka!" He also suggests if any of his friends want to know how he and all connected with him, look after floundering through mud and rain after many nights and days, they can take a photo of an old hen after she has had a bath in a swill barrel! One thing is certain, misfortune and bad luck can't break down Burr Robbins. He has pluck and energy enough to command an army, and like Napoleon knows no such word as "fail."

The following representative squibs from various newspapers underscore the importance of the circus in American life.

The Daily Gazette, Davenport, Iowa, 10 August 1873, p.2.

Interior towns all over the State are praying for a circus to come.

Cambridge City Tribune, Cambridge City, Indiana, 18 September 1873, p. 2.

One old man walked seventeen miles to see Lent's circus, last Monday. A younger brother, 65 years old, gave out on the way and could not make the trip.—Columbus Republican.

The Galveston Daily News, Galveston, Texas, 14 December 1873, p. 6.

A Massachusetts life convict has whittled a miniature circus containing 2175 figures.

Daily Nevada State Journal, Reno, Nevada, 12 October 1875, p. 2

An Iowa girl took poison because she was unable to go to a circus.

The Elyria Constitution, Elyria, Ohio, 22 June 1876, p. 1

On the arrival of a circus at St. Croix, Wis., a family who lived twenty-two miles distant sold their only stove to raise the money to attend. Their method of traveling was by means of an ox-team. One day was consumed in going, another in witnessing the entertainment, and a third in returning. Happy and contented they arrived at their stoveless home, and voted the circus the best thing they had ever witnessed and the money well and advantageously invested.

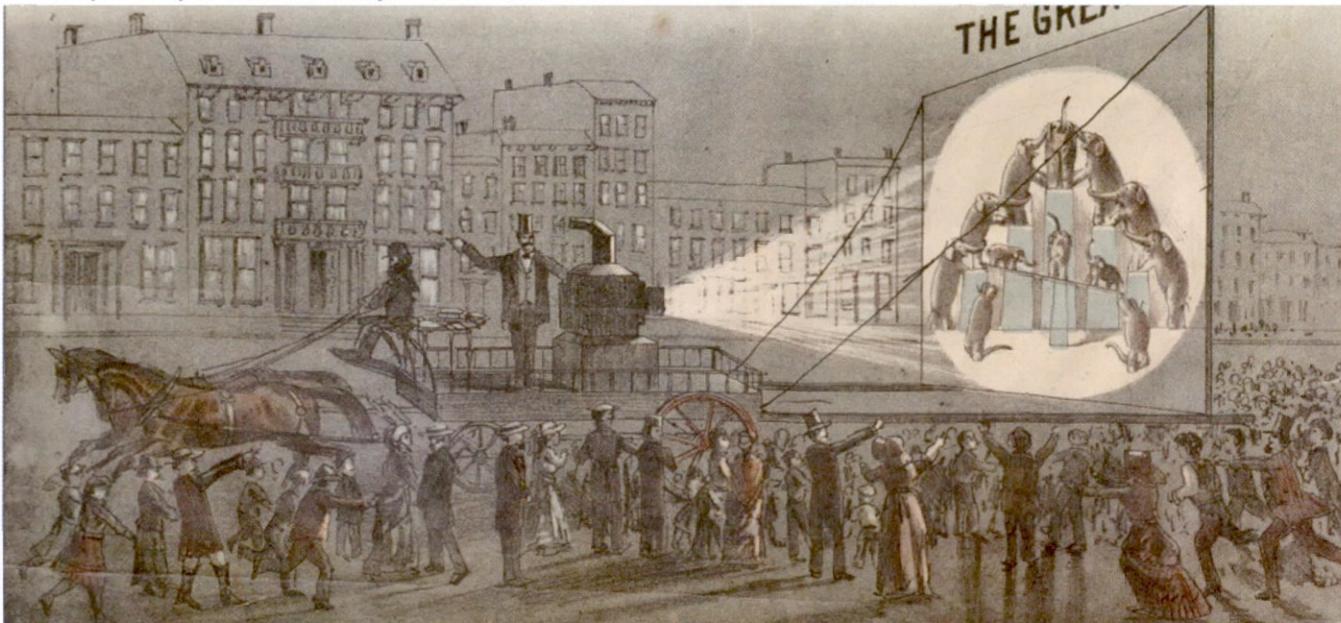
The Richwood Gazette, Richwood, Ohio, 5 July 1877, p. 1.

Brooklyn women seek a divorce on a very slight pretext. Mrs. Pratt, of that city, asks a legal separation from her husband because he flung a pitcher at her, hit her with a lighted kerosene lamp, drew a knife across her neck and threatened to cut her throat, threw a glass bottle at her, stuck a fork in her leg, poured hot tea over her, hit her in the back with a bootjack, and refused to give her money to go to the circus.

Nevada State Journal, Reno, Nevada, 23 August 1877, p. 3.

People were here yesterday from everywhere—ranch, mill, mine, Sunday School, county towns and in fact everywhere that people lived. It was 4th of July with all the Centennial side dishes, over again. Not few noble red men and a sprinkling of Chinamen completed the throng that lined our streets yesterday—and all because 4 paws big “horse opera” was here. When a circus ceases to draw, then comes the millennium.

Liberty Weekly Tribune, Liberty, Missouri, 29 March



1878, p. 3.

Spring has come, and by and by
Along will come the circus.
When little urchins all will try
Hard and long to jerk us
Out of a quarter to go to the show
As we old chaps did years ago.

The Cedar Rapids Times, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 22 August 1878, p. 3.

Judging from the great crowd which attended the show on Friday times are not so very hard in this “neck o’ woods.” But then you can’t most always tell what you least expect the most, as ye granger can always raise the wherewith to attend a circus.

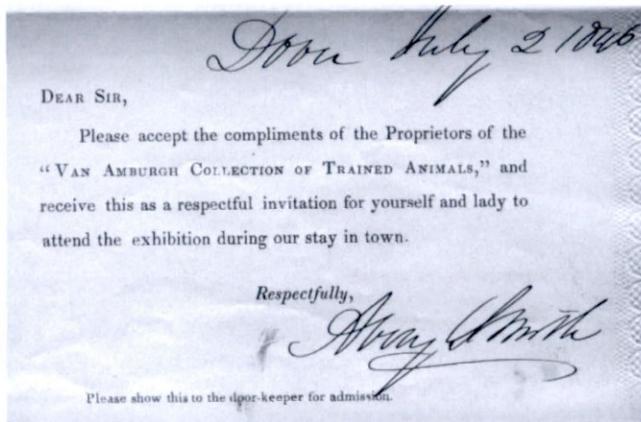
In Blaine’s Own State, *The Daily Constitution*, Atlanta, Georgia, 17 September 1878, p. 1.

Lewiston, Me., September 16—Six ruffians assaulted a lady and gentleman while returning from a circus Saturday night. Two held the man while the others brutally outraged the woman. Five arrests have been made.

Stereoscopic, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 25 June 1879, p. 4.

The stereoscopic exhibition of Cooper & Bailey’s Great London Circus and Menagerie given in front of the Eau Claire House last evening, attracted a large crowd of interested spectators among which the juvenile portion of the community was predominant. The pictures gave a vivid illustration of what can be viewed inside of the tents and in the pageant next Tuesday. Mr. Bernard will give a repetition of the illustrations at Chippewa Falls this evening.

A stereoscopic exhibition as described in the *Daily Free Press* of Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1879. This illustration is from an 1880 Cooper and Bailey Circus lithograph which is part of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.



Van Amburgh pass signed by Avery Smith in 1846. Fred D. Pfening III collection.

Gone with a Circus Man, *Decatur Daily Review*, Decatur, Illinois, 28 August 1879, p. 4.

Davenport, Io. Aug. 27.—A young woman of 18 years, daughter of Morgan Orendorf, one of the best known farmers in this county, a resident of Butler township, either eloped with or was abducted by a circus man at Monmouth, Jackson county, Iowa, last Saturday, where she was visiting friends. The father heard of it yesterday and went in pursuit, but at last accounts had not found his daughter.

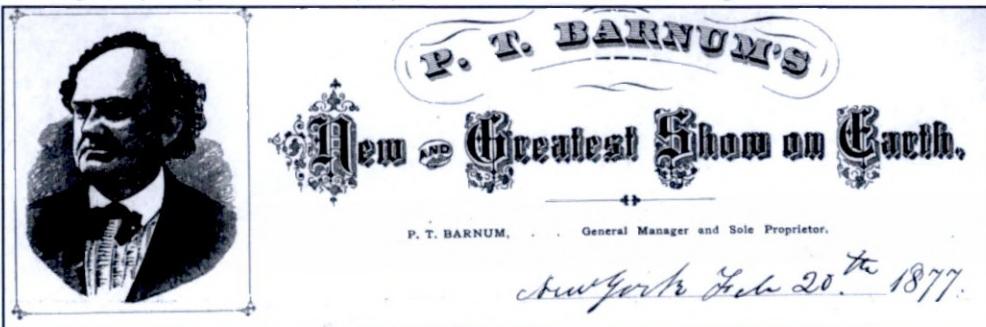
The passing of an important showman was always newsworthy. This obituary of the great Avery Smith, while incorrect in some particulars, is a masterful summary of the qualities necessary to be a successful circus owner.

A Successful Showman's Life, *New York Times*, New York, New York, 31 December 1876, p. 12.

The *Times* of yesterday contained a report of the funeral of the late Avery Smith, the well-known circus proprietor, whose death occurred on Tuesday last, after a protracted illness, at his residence in Newark, N. J. the prominent public life of this man deserves more than a passing notice, as he was probably one of the best managers of the circus business in his generation. Mr. Smith was born in North Salem, Westchester County, N. Y., in February, 1814, and was consequently 62 years of age. His father was a showman before him, as were also his uncles, and the youthful Avery sniffed the smell of sawdust and had his eyes dazzled by spangles from his earliest infancy. Under these circumstances, it was not strange that he inherited a natural proclivity for the fascinations, excitements, and vicissitudes of a showman's life. After finishing his school-days, he availed himself of the first opportunity which offered to cut loose from the sugar, molasses, teas and spices of the grocery business in which his father had placed him, and engaged himself to a traveling circus. He early displayed many of those qualities for which he became more remarkable in after life, but,

yielding to the solicitations of his family, he once more became a grocer, and his rare business qualifications made him notably successful among persons engaged in the same business, and at the close of a few years he became the head of a large wholesale establishment in partnership with William Howes, at the corner of Vesey and Greenwich streets. Accumulating quite a fortune, he retired, and invested the bulk of it in the circus business in consonance with his strong predilections which he had always felt for that occupation.

The first establishment with which he was connected was that of Van Amburgh & Co., Van Amburgh having won his first reputation under the management of Mr. Smith's father at the old Zoological Institute in the Bowery. With this company he made the tour of Great Britain and the principal cities of the continent. On his return to America he organized the well-known traveling company of Sands, Nathan & Co., his partners being Richard Sands—who created so great a sensation through this country and in England by his antipodean feat of walking across a smooth marble slab head downward—Jared [Gerard] Quick, Lewis June, and John J. Nathans. This establishment was exceedingly popular from Maine to Georgia and continued traveling every Summer for a number of years. Mr. Smith then engaged the celebrated Franconi, of Paris, to come to this country, and built the Hippodrome on the former site of "Corporal" Tomson's cottage, on the corner of Twenty-third Street and Broadway, where the Fifth Avenue Hotel is now located. At the close of the season of 1854 this establishment traveled under the management of Mr. Smith, together with another company known as that of June, Nathan & Co. Mr. Smith again visited Europe, and entered into a contract with Seth Howes, by which he obtained control of the novel paraphernalia, "Dragon-Chariots," and other vehicles of novel form and gaudy ornamentation which had largely conduced to the popularity of the circus establishment of Howes & Cushing in Great Britain and on the Continent. With these properties and others which he had manufactured in America, he started what was known as "The Great European Circus," the firm being Quick & Nathans. This establishment was celebrated more especially for the magnificent street display which it made on entering the various towns in



Letterhead used by the P. T. Barnum Show in 1877, Pfening Archives.

which it exhibited; a notable attraction being a large lion, which was drawn through the streets on a gilded platform car, loose and unchained, guarded only by his keep-

er, Crockett. This lion was named "Parker." He first distinguished himself by killing and partly devouring two of his keepers, at Astley's Amphitheatre, London, and has since added to his reputation by killing one or two others in this country, and maiming several more. This "noble brute" is now in transient retirement among the zoological collection at Central Park. A few years ago Mr. Smith dissolved partnership with those with whom he had been connected, and retired from the circus business for a short time, devoting himself to other business pursuits.

But "once a showman always a showman," is an adage with which every showman is familiar. Avery Smith was not an exception to the rule, and it was not long before he organized a company and sent it to South America, obtaining as a reward for his enterprise large returns of coffee, logwoods, &c.

His latest enterprise was in conjunction with P. T. Barnum, with whom he joined forces last winter, and placed the "Great Roman Hippodrome," which lately closed its season at Gilmore's Garden, upon the road last Spring. All of Mr. Smith's ventures in the show business proved successful, and he realized there from a large fortune, in which his partner shared. He was a man of great shrewdness and solid commercial ability. During his career as a showman he made himself a thorough master of the topography of all parts of the country. He knew every turnpike, neighborhood road, bridge in every county, North, South, East, and West, and the distances from one town to another, and even the condition of the ways of travel. Was a bridge a covered one, he could tell its height in the clear, and whether chariots, band-wagons, and platform-cars could pass under it without unlimbering. Did he send his circus through an agricultural county, he was as well acquainted with the crop prospects there as the farmers themselves; whether the route lay through a manufacturing, mining, coal, or lumber district, he knew its exact condition. In fact, there was very little likely to affect his business with which he was not thoroughly familiar. His advice was always taken by all with whom he was associated, and the greatest confidence was reposed in his judgment. He was regarded as strictly honest in all of his transactions, his word being emphatically "as good as his bond." His judgment was sound, and he was endowed with great shrewdness. He was a firm friend, generous and charitable. None will miss him more than his associates in business. He was taken ill some time ago, but it was not until a short time since that any great anxiety was felt by his family and friends. The disease from which he suffered, however, made rapid progress, and his death had been hourly expected for several days. He leaves a wife and one son.

After James Robinson, Levi J. North was the most accomplished American male rider of the nineteenth century. Retired and living in Brooklyn in 1877, the sixty-two year old North had a chance encounter with a Brooklyn Eagle reporter who knew a good story when he saw one,

and proceeded to interview the old performer.

HOOP-LA! An Interesting Interview with an Old Circus Performer—What Mr. Levi J. North Has done in His day—The King of the Circus ring who was Called Upon to Astonish the King of France—Some of the "Old Time" Bills, Changes that Time Has Wrought in the Business, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 18 March 1877, p. 2.

"No, sir, we had no such means of conveyance in those days that circus companies can take advantage of now. Our traveling was pretty rough at times. Pull up stakes at two or three in the morning and jog along over miry road, mayhap though swamps, never losing a minute, but pressing forward to the next town or village, or wherever we were going to show."

Levi J. North, famous rider. Pfening Archives.

It was Mr. Levi J. North who spoke. A man past the middle age considerably, clean shaved, slight in stature, well knit frame, and a determined expression about the mouth that betokened a firmness and solidity of character that could not be mistaken. He was sitting in his old friend, Tom Dent's, cozy parlors in Jay street, and talking in a pleasant way of what had long passed out of the memory of many who had witnessed them. The fire burned brightly in the grate, and at times Mr. North peered in between the bars as if he saw the pictures of his trials and triumphs in the glowing coals. Perhaps he did. He had experienced many of them both. No man worked harder or more earnestly to become the equestrian of the circus world than he did, and neither before nor after him has any one man enjoyed for so long a time the unrivaled popularity that he commanded for years. His daring feats of horsemanship, which he originated and perfected, created a revolution in the old time bareback performances. Before his time there were few who had even learned to turn a somersault on horseback, but no man ever did what is known as

THE DOUBLE SOMERSAULT

--turning a somersault backward and forward on bareback and without stopping. This feat is seldom accomplished nowadays, but when Mr. North introduced it, it was so much of a marvel that one circus manager in England (where Mr. North went to perform) and who saw this double somersault act advertised declared that "it couldn't be done." In all his acts Mr. North excelled; he was the most daring and graceful rider that the public had ever seen, and he retained his popularity from the day that he first won it until his last appearance in public as an equestrian.

An Eagle man happened to be present in Dent's when Mr. North made the remark which directly follows the caption of this article, and desiring an introduction, Mr. Dent kindly accommodated him. After a few desultory remarks the reporter inquired how it was that he ever entered the circus business.

"Took a fancy to it," said he. "I saw a circus or so round our village and got a circus fever and I went. How old was I? Just about twelve, that was all. Let me see, it's exactly



HALF A CENTURY AGO,
last September, that I entered the business, and I'm a little over sixty-two years of age now. I remember my first trip well. I was apprenticed for two years to Howe, Quick & Mead, the proprietors of the Washington Circus, and I made pretty rapid progression, so that I was doing good acts before I was out of my time." "Is the training hard, Mr. North?"

"Well—no; I can't say that it is, but even in training, things are systematized nowadays. In my time—that is, when I was apprenticed—we rode bareback and had nothing to hold on by except a ring at the end of a sort of whip, which was held by the instructor. If we fell on the off side, he would pull us up, if we slipped on his side, he was on the lookout to catch us. Now, however, they have a regular rig, where the beginner is held in a sort of jacket, which is suspended to a pole running from and working round the centre pole like a derrick. If he falls, the horse goes on and he is suspended in the air without injury."

"How long did it take you to become an expert?"

"As I said before, I did a good deal of regular business before my apprenticeship was over. You can easily judge of that from this bill—I was "Master North" at that time as you will observe."

The veteran equestrian here showed a copy of the circus bill of that date, which he had printed on satin, adding: "When I used to get a benefit it was the custom to have a few copies of the bill struck off on silk or satin." The portion of the bill relating to "Master North's benefit" is as follows:

AN OLD TIME BILL
CIRCUS CHRISTMAS NIGHT

For the benefit of Master North, the Young American Prodigy Master North respectfully informs his friends and the public that his benefit takes place on this evening December 25, 1827 when a variety of equestrian ENTERTAINMENTS WILL BE BROUGHT FORWARD. The performance to commence with GALLOPING, VAULTING by the BY THE whole troupe of VOLTIGUERS. Horsemanship by Master North, in which he will go Through a variety of feats of agility, such as Jumping Whip, Hoop, Garters, etc., etc., and Conclude by throwing a wonderful back-ward somersault off his horse, his horse going at FULL SPEED. The Lilliputian Clown's act of Horsemanship by Master Rogers. Ring Master—Master North. Grand Trampoline or Flying Leaps, by Master North over Garters, Horses and so forth and conclude by a wonderful somersault through a fire balloon.

At the bottom of this bill is the following notice: "All demands against the Washington Circus to be presented on or before Thursday next. Seats can be secured by applying at Messrs. Green and Morris' tavern, between the hours of ten and two o'clock."

"They were ale taverns in those days," continued Mr. North, "and that reminds me—you have seen the street parades the circus occasionally gives nowadays, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, in those days we had about six members of the company we used to put up in country places at the tav-

ern and from there we issued forth, before the performances to the tent, all of us in our dresses, and ahead of us was

AN OLD BASS DRUM AND A KEY BUGLE.

It makes me laugh to think of it sometimes. The man that played the key bugle, I remember, had about as much idea of a tune as a pig has about a clean shirt, but I tell you we thought we were some[thing], those days. Now the only music we had under the canvas was an old hurdy gurdy which had a regular set of tunes, one of which would be played at each performance—I mean during the different acts."

"Did you ever travel much?"

"Yes, I went to England and to France—this was about 1840. I had made a big reputation then."

"Talking about European trips," said Mr. North. "I was playing in Paris—they had an elegant place there for such entertainments—and I was sent for by special request to perform before King Louis Philippe, and at the conclusion of the performance I received a valuable present from him. This, together with a gold medal and an elegant snuff box and other presents, I lost in the Chicago fire. When I played in Paris it was at the Champs Elysees, and when I performed before the King and his suite it was at the Royal Riding School at Neuilly. I was treated in a magnificently liberal manner, as were the rest of the troupe on that occasion."

"You don't appear now?"

"No, I am getting too old and have given it up. I reside here in Brooklyn, and while I naturally feel an interest in the business, I have given up all active part in it."

So saying Mr. North folded up his satin programmes and with a courteous adieu walked out of Dent's and briskly down the street.

"You wouldn't believe," said Mr. Dent, "that he walks about eight or nine miles a day on an average?"

"No."

"Well, he does."

When P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth played Eau Claire, Wisconsin on 16 July 1877, the local papers gave the momentous event extensive coverage. The excitement circus day generated in dull and dreary small town America is eloquently conveyed in the following items. They also touch upon other aspects of the show's appearance: licensing and taxation, routing, social and economic impact, excursions, disruption of public order and safety, advance ticket sales, pickpockets, confidence men and gamblers. Taken together, the breadth of these short bursts of commentary provides a remarkably comprehensive portrait of what circus day meant in the hinterlands.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 20 June 1877, p. 4.

Barnum's great show has been scared away from us, owing to the excessive license charged here; which will prevent this famous showman from giving Eau Claire a benefit, by leaving more nickels with us than his receipts could amount to under the most favorable circumstances.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 28 June 1877, p. 4.

P. T. Barnum's big show is booked for Eau Claire Monday, July 16.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 28 June 1877, p. 4.

Just before the [City] Council adjourned last night Ald. Cousins rose to remark that there was a circus coming here. At this festive season of the year every one wanted to see a circus. The circus, however, would be obliged to skip us unless the license was reduced. Then our people would go to Chippewa Falls and spend their money there instead of here, and the Aldermen would lose the show, for, Mr. Cousins was sure, none of them had money enough to go up there and see it. He thought if the Council drove circuses away from town, the boys would drive them away. These humorous observations were followed by a lot more in the same vein from other members of the Council, but no decision, and to the great joy of the reporter the city fathers presently adjourned. Nevertheless we sympathize with the anxiety of the Alderman from the third. Let us have a circus or we bust.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 29 June 1877, p. 4.

The city authorities reduced the license somewhat for the Barnum show.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 30 June 1877, p. 3.

F. S. Couldock, agent for Barnum's big show, is in the city making arrangements for the appearance of that monster concern at this place on Monday July 16. There will be a big crowd here at that time as this city will be the only place at which it will stop between Janesville and St. Paul.

Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 5 July 1877, p. 3.

Barnum's show posters seemed to be of almost as much interest to the country people, yesterday as anything that came under their observation. All day long crowds might have been seen standing before the bulletin boards, gazing upon the picture of the "wonders of the world."

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 6 July 1877, p. 4.

Some of Barnum's bulletin boards were prostrated by the wind yesterday, and were replaced in position again this morning.

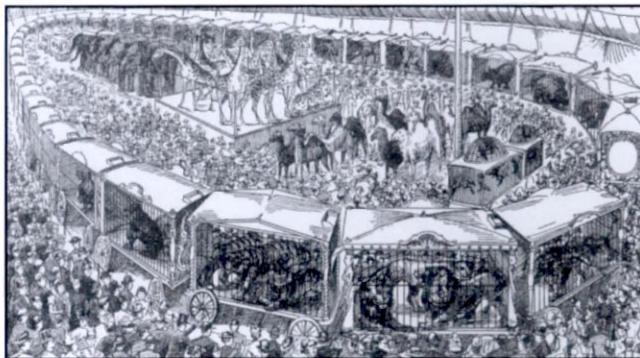
Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 7 July 1877, p. 3.

On the 16th, inst., the day that Barnum shows at Eau Claire, the Chippewa Falls and Western Railway Company will make five round trips over their road, giving all who wish to go to the show from here an opportunity to do so.

Tickets for the round trip including admission to the show will be one dollar. Those who come in from the country can leave their teams at the depot, where men will be ready to take charge of them till they return, such enterprise on the part of the management of the road is commendable and [we] have no doubt that many hundreds of people will take advantage of the opportunity offered.

A Grand Opportunity, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 13 July 1877, p. 4.

Monday—circus day—there will be more people in town than ever before at a given time. Barnum's Great Show gives but two exhibitions—one day, afternoon and evening—on the line of the West Wisconsin railway, and many people will be in town from adjoining counties. We shall issue two editions of that day—the first immediately after dinner, the other at our regular hour. We shall issue a thousand extra copies, and the opportunity for our merchants to advertise their wares through our columns will be a most favorable one, and one of which they should take advantage. New advertisements should be handed in as early as Saturday afternoon, in order that we may be able to do justice to advertisers.



Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 13 July 1877, p. 4.

Barnum's Circus will arrive Sunday afternoon, and two of the largest locomotives belonging to the West Wis. road will be required to draw the heavy trains.

The Ticket Outrage, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 13 July 1877, p. 4.

Editor Free Press—I would like to say a word in behalf of the people who are about to attend Mr. Barnum's show. The Circus is to appear at this place on Monday next, and Mr. Barnum advertises "seats may now be obtained for the usual slight advance at McFarland's, post office building." Now what I would ask, is, are those who patronize Mr. Barnum under any obligation to pay two prices of admission because of being granted the great privilege of purchasing their tickets without having to fight their way through a noisy, boisterous, and not unfrequently (sic) drunken crowd to secure them. Tickets for all other entertainments can be had in advance, and for the same price, as they can be procured at the door. For any entertainment excepting a circus it is not difficult to purchase tickets at the door, and if anybody is under obligations to the public to price tickets where accessible, it is certainly that of a circus manager, and if Mr. Barnum cannot, he should not invite people to his show. Citizen

Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 3.

All those who do not secure tickets for the train and circus, this evening, will be throwing away opportunities. Chippewa Falls is favored this time; we can get tickets without fighting for them or paying the extra price demanded at Eau Claire. Call on the railroad men at once and buy your tickets.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 4.

The costume of Barnum's tattooed man is suggestive of comfort to-day.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 4.

Ice cream and peanut vendors are getting ready to stick out shingles circus day.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 3.

Next Monday the "great and only show" of P. T. Barnum will spread its tents on University Hill. It is expected that there will be a very large number of people here from the surrounding country on that occasion. This being the only stopping place of the show between Janesville and St. Paul, visitors may be expected from quite a circuit of country, and no doubt the number of strangers who will [be in the] city to see the sights will be very large.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 3.

Captain Georges Costentenus, a foreign gentleman and a man of mark, is expected in the city next Monday.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 14 July 1877, p. 3.

P. T. Barnum's Show is Coming! to show to an Audience of 20,000 people, and to accommodate them we have reduced prices 20 per cent on Clothing. See what money will buy. . . . Fine line of neck wear linen collars, kid gloves, shirt jewelry, etc. McMillan & Co.

Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 3.*

All good people attended church yesterday forenoon, and then went to Eau Claire to see the circus arrive in the afternoon.

Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 3.*

All the Church members are more liberal to-day than usual and are taking the children to see the animals, you know! What a load those poor children have to carry on their innocent shoulders.

Chippewa Falls Department, *Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 3.*

A large number of our citizens availed themselves of the opportunity to ride to Eau Claire on the special train, yesterday that they might judge of the Circus and see if it was worth patronizing and all returned with a firm determination to see the same or bust. On the way home

Conductor Strong thought he would show the excursionists what he could do with his train, and brought them home in fourteen minutes by the watch and did not half try either.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

This is the day we celebrate—circus day.

A beautiful day—and j-e-hu what a crowd!!

Thieves are getting the worst of it up to noon to-day.

Barnum's tattooed man was on the street last night. He is a great curiosity.

Barnum's show people are 650 strong to-day and quiet and orderly withal.

Don't go to the circus and leave your house at the mercy of prowlers, but securely fasten doors and windows.

One eye on the money till while the other is on the procession, may not be a bad suggestion to our merchants.

Most of the mills and many of the laboring classes have suspended work for today. Work will be resumed to-morrow as usual.

Nearly every wagon which came in this morning with it load of humanity, had more or less produce of various kinds aboard.

The town is thronged with people from Augusta, Chippewa Falls, Menomonie, Fairchild, Rock Falls, Rusk, Fall Creek, elk Mound, Vanville, and the country people from the adjoining counties are in town in force.

Is It Mastodon or Elephant? *Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.*

Some workmen at Cal Harmison's brick yard, while engaged in getting out clay from a pit about 70 feet deep on Saturday evening, found a piece of an ivory tusk. It is in a good state of preservation, is about 16 inches in length, and will weigh about five or six pounds. On account of the circus, work at the yard has been suspended to-day, but tomorrow further search will be made.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

Four suspicious looking individuals were gobbled on the midnight freight train and lodged in jail. They pretended to belong to the circus, but Barnum's people disown them. At any rate they will not feed the monkeys or expatriate on the wonderful living objects inside the canvas to-day.

Several drunk and disorderlies paid the regular fine this morning.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

Full of Interest,—Yesterday for hours the depot steps and grounds were packed with people awaiting the arrival of Barnum's show which arrived at 5 o'clock p. m. Immediately the unloading process commenced, which attracted the attention of many people as the great covered cages were removed from the depot to the grounds by one two three and as high as seven horse teams. No serious accident occurred, a milk cart runaway being the

only occurrence of note. Everybody remarked on the superior size and beauty of the horses attached to the great heavy wagons—the finest lot of draught horses we ever saw.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

Happenings.—It was evident that Andrew Oleson's horse had never seen the elephant until yesterday, for when that bevy of elephants hove in sight, Andrew's horse reared and becoming unmanageable, pitched Andrew out to the road side scattering the milk and ice cream cans in a manner astonishing to everybody, even the elephants. Charging around the corner, the animal became ashamed of himself and took pity on Andrew, stopping at the first customer's house he came to where milk and ice cream were taken.

A page from the 1877 Barnum route book listing the opening stands. Pfening Archives.

OPENING OF THE SEASON.

AT GILMORE'S GARDEN, ON FOURTH AVENUE, BETWEEN TWENTY-SIXTH AND TWENTY-SEVENTH STREET, FOR THE SEASON OF FOUR WEEKS, COMMENCING APRIL 9th UNTIL MAY 5th.

MAY.

Monday, 7th—Danbury, Conn., weather fair, 64 miles.
Tuesday, 8th—Bridgeport, Conn., weather bad and rain, 41 miles.

Wednesday, 9th, New Haven, Conn., cool and cloudy, 14 miles.
Thursday, 10th—Hartford, Conn., weather cool, 36 miles.
Friday and Saturday, 11th and 12th—Providence, R. I. A boy received a stroke from one of the young lions, cutting the scalp slightly. Cool and sun warm. 90 miles.

Monday, 14th—Pawtucket, R. I., weather warm, 4 miles.
Tuesday, 15th—Fall River, Mass., weather warm, 22 miles.
Wednesday, 16th—Woonsocket, R. I., warm and some rain, 36 miles.

Thursday, 17th—Worcester, Mass., weather very warm, 32 miles.
Friday, 18th—Springfield, Mass., very warm, 55 miles.
Saturday, 19th—Pittsfield, Mass., weather fine, 56 miles.
Monday, 21st—Rome, N. Y. Sun warm in morning; rained hard in afternoon. 187 miles.

Tuesday, 22d—Oswego, N. Y., rained all day, 73 miles.
Wednesday, 23d—Watertown, N. Y., weather cool, 72 miles.
Thursday, 24th—Ogdensburg, N. Y., weather cool and some rain, 69 miles.
Friday, 25th—Malone, N. Y., rained all morning, 72 miles.
Saturday, 26th—Plattsburg, N. Y., weather cool; Sunday very fine; 61 miles.

There are a great many people in town to-day and all will have abundant opportunity to see the elephant.

J. W. Hamilton, the gentlemanly press agent of Barnum's show, made us a pleasant business call to-day leaving greenbacks, together with a good impression.

The old game of engaging the merchants attention in one part of the store, by one thief while another taps the till, will be tried to-day, and probably with effect.

Remember the Annex, to-day, immediately after the big show. It is full of merit and well worthy the name it bears as possessing triple the interest of any after show.

Nearly all of the city churches have refreshment stands on the East side to-day, where they have every conceivable article to appease the appetite. They are having a very liberal patronage.

The Chippewa bridge was well tested this morning by the weight of the almost numberless passengers and teams who were constantly crossing. At times the guards were so densely thronged as to render passing next to impossibility, the pedestrians neglecting to obey the summons, "keep to the right."

People from the country should carefully read the new advertisements and local mentions of the firms calling the attention to their wares to-day, and remember them in the future, should they not purchase to-day. They are all enterprising and reliable dealers.

A large force of special policemen are (sic) in service to-day.

What is it that gets everybody out to a circus, when they don't care a d—n about the show, either?

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

Everybody was doing their very best this morning to obtain a good view of P. T. Barnum's grand street procession, but General Perokoitschitzshy says that Samuel J. Tilden informed him that he heard George Shaw say that Jennie Louise Hengler told him that Sam Ellis heard that there was no doubt that Billy Marble said that Joe Culver thought Captain Costentenu had told Henry Slingluff that Louisa Dillon had declared to George Daniels that it was generally believed that Tony Pastor said in plain terms that he heard Den Callahan say that this friend Miss Jennelle De Bonnaire had said that John Rooney informed her, at Chippewa Falls, that it was well known all over the country that Maggie Mitchell had caught Colonel Kelley in saying that in his opinion it was a matter of fact and of great public interest that Geo. Williams said Corporal Breckurnajckoff had

told him that Geo. T. Thompson had said P. B. Morrison did say that all circus goers of Eau Claire, and surrounding country, supposed from what Milo Burger had told them that Bob Ingersoll intimated that old Parish said that Stanley Matthews thought he heard Tom Kempt say that anyone found reading this on Monday afternoon, July 16, 1877, must proceed at once, with their lovers and sweet-hearts, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, rich and poor relations of every degree, and purchase of W. H. McFarland a bounteous supply of apples, oranges, lemons, pears, peaches, cigars, stationery and fresh home-made candies, the best to be found in the city; also tickets for the Great Show. Come early and avoid the crowd.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 16 July 1877, p. 4.

John Heenan came in all the way from the Black Hills, to-day. He looks as slick as Barnum's "Trakene" stallions.

Chippewa Fall Department, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 3.

The trains from this place to Eau Claire were crowded to their utmost capacity yesterday. The notice that Barnum was to be in Eau Claire with his great circus, attracted large crowds of people that seldom leave home to attend any other kind of amusement, and every man turned out with his wife and family, and made a regular holiday of it. We have not learned how many tickets were sold over the road, but there must have been at least a thousand people from this place. All those who attended the circus, with very few exceptions, speak well of it, and feel amply repaid for their time and money. Those who

took the trip have at least seen Barnum's circus, and that is a great deal; those who had been more fortunate cannot crow over them anymore, and throw Barnum up in their faces, for they know all about the whole outfit.

Chippewa Fall Department, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 3.

We went to Eau Claire Monday to see the "greatest and best show on earth." We had seen in one or two papers, and notified in two or three places on the walls, that the "greatest show on earth" was to be there, and we felt desirous of seeing the "greatest show on earth." We went, and we saw. We know that it was the "greatest show on earth," because the man with the big paunch said so, and he ought to know. We came home so satisfied that when another "greatest show on earth" comes along we shall feel that there is nothing more for us to see, that we have exhausted the whole catalogue, and for that reason stay severely at home. Great shows are good things. Dust is a good thing (in its place), but dust is very wayward and hard to keep in its place, and the best way to manage it is to keep away and not disturb it. When the next great show comes along we will be found trying to manage our share of the dust on that plan.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

Anyone that can go to Barnum's show and witness the chair feat, and come home and say woman is not two-thirds jaw, is a l—r.

Sheriff Daniels released the three captives on his own recognition, this morning, who were locked up Sunday as suspicious characters and lodged in the county jail by the police.

Barnum's management estimated the audience yesterday afternoon as not varying 100 either way from 8,000 people, being but about 600 less than the largest audience they ever show to. The audience in the evening could not have been more than half as large.

Yesterday was a most fortunate day, considering the amount of people in town. We learn of but one accident—that of a runaway in the Third ward, the wagon passing over a man and the team bringing up against Phil Yager's fence. The man's name we did not learn, nor the extent of his injuries.

Police Items, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

There were only seven drunk and disorderlies in the lock-up this morning; a pretty good record for circus day. Five of these were fined \$3.00 each, and costs, and two were let off with a reprimand.

The four men, who were arrested on the freight train night before last, are still in jail. Chief Wolf received a telegram from Fond du Lac yesterday evening and expects more news relative to the parties today. It is supposed that they stole \$150 in the city mentioned. [The Barnum show was in Fond du Lac on 12 July.]

The Way He Did It, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

The candy man got his work in yesterday. [While t]he

attentive couple were watching the performance, he carefully placed two painted sticks in her lap. Turning to the Lothario with a nudge, he is informed quietly that the lady has ordered some candy. The eyes of the young man follow those of the candy peddler instinctively to the lap of the young lady, whose attention by this time has also been diverted to the situation. She blushes; a business look is put on by the peddler; the situation becomes awkward. The young man to get out of the dilemma pulls out 30 cents and hands it over. He bleeds well, and is informed it is not enough. A one or two dollar bill, as the case may be, is then forthcoming. The candy operator snatches it—crams it in his vest pocket and, returning for change the same 30 cents handed him before, turns on his heel and starts off, shouting at the top of his voice. "Here's your fine barber pole candy—one for yourself—one for your sister and one for you mother—w-h-o h-a-s t-h-e n-e-x-t?" If any exception is taken to the change, the question of integrity becomes involved and with a withering look of indignation, the candy man shows the management by an unqualified denial—that he is too much of a gentleman to do such a thing, and that settles it.

Fairchild Correspondence, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

Quite a delegation of our citizens took a benefit Monday, by attending Barnum's show at Eau Claire.

Personal, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

Johnnie Barrett of the St. Paul detective force was in town yesterday, and attended the show. He was probably "shadowing" the "hangars on" with a view of giving them a warm reception when they visit St. Paul. [The Barnum show played St. Paul on 17 July.]

Mr. Simons from Buffalo, father to Mrs. Judge Teall, who has been visiting this place for several days, left for home this afternoon. He remarked this morning that he never saw so large an assemblage as yesterday at the circus, that were (sic) so peaceable and well behaved.

We heard a young man, whose pa keeps chickens, remark last night, at the close of the circus, that he proposed to "rotten egg" the next clown that forced him to listen to the story of the "ship that laid to," of being born in the last hour of the year, the last minute of the hour, &c. He wants something new; his father is a doctor and he can read all such on Sunday in most any Almanac for 1876 or '77.

Yesterday's Show, *Daily Free Press*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

Barnum's exhibition of yesterday we believe fulfilled all that was claimed for it in point of merit—that of being the finest animal display and circus extant. Everything was conducted systematically, quietly and orderly, there being less slang and profanity among the attaches of the circus than is usual. There was every facility offered our police by the attaches of the circus for spotting thieves, which was very commendable. All the remarkable feats advertised were done and well done too. The Menagerie was the best we ever saw, and the side show or Annex, possessed human curiosities of the strangest character,

exciting the most intense curiosity, profound study and attention. Suffice to say we heard no adverse criticisms, all those from a distance alike with those from here, expressed admiration for the great show of yesterday.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 17 July 1877, p. 4.

Fourteen thieves and monte men were on the western bound train last night, to do the crowd at St. Paul to-day. As they are not allowed passage with the show they could not make connections from Janesville in time to "work the crowd" here which accounted for the unusual quiet in that regard here yesterday during the performance.

Daily Free Press, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 4.

Retail trade in nearly all branches of business has been fully up to the expectations this week. The attendance at the circus at the beginning of the week left a great many strangers in the city who were not afraid of spending their money where they could get the worth in return.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

We counted fifteen refreshment stands near the circus grounds on Monday.

We received a call on Monday from Mr. J. W. Hamilton, the gentlemanly press agent of Mr. Barnum. Mr. Hamilton is one of the most accommodating and liberal agents with whom we have had any dealings, and he makes every effort to please the profession.

Turned Loose, *The Eau Claire News*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

The four suspicious characters taken from the Sunday night freight train and lodged in the lock-up by Chief Wolf, were taken out on Tuesday and discharged. They were the parties suspected of stealing \$115 from a hat and cap store in Fond du Lac, and also of having robbed a farmer near that place of \$150. They made tracks out of town with all haste as soon as set at liberty.

Personal, *The Eau Claire News*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

H. J. Hoffman, Esq., of Madison, came over to see the circus on Monday. The greatest show on earth don't stop at such small places as Madison.

Hon. L. C. Stanley, General Manager of the Chippewa Falls and Western R. R. came down on Monday to see the elephant.

Rev. A Kidder, of Durand, was in the city on Monday. He did not come up to see the Menagerie.

H. O. Wood, Esq., came up from Milwaukee on Monday last to see Barnum's Circassian girl.

Gone, *The Eau Claire News*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

The big show with its elephants, monkeys, fat women, Circassian girls, acrobats, clowns, lemonade peddlers, and the thousand and one things belonging to it, has come and gone. On the whole it was quite a satisfactory show, and the 10,000 people who visited it here appeared well pleased with it. The menagerie contained a large collection of interesting animals and curiosities of various kinds, while the circus performance was much above the ordinary standard, and quite free from anything objectionable. The agents, performers, and employees generally, appeared to be of a much better class of persons than usually travel with shows. The management of the concern is in good hands, and everything moved along with the regularity of clock work. Owing to the very complete arrangements of Chief Wolf for the preservation of order, the day was almost entirely free from disturbances of all kinds. The show is now astonishing the natives in Minnesota.

Elsie Dockrill, lady rider. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 21 July 1877, p. 3.

Owing to the ample arrangements made by Capt. Wolf, the thieves and pickpockets did not reap much of a harvest here on circus day. Two men from Neillsville, and one from Chippewa Falls had their pockets picked in the crowd at the depot, but fortunately they did not lose much money. We heard of no thefts from any of our own citizens.

The Eau Claire News, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 28 July 1877, p. 3.

The Chippewa Herald is down on Barnum's circus and says it was the thinnest entertainment ever given in the Chippewa valley. The Herald man probably went into a side show and thought he was in the main tent.

Interviews with animal trainers were a staple. Alfred Still, the subject of this one, was at the time the tiger trainer on Howe's Great London Circus then appearing at Gilmore's Garden in New York City. Still was with the London again in 1878, then moved with that show's physical plant to Cooper and Bailey in 1879 and 1880, and to Barnum and London in 1881. While Still's reliance on whipping and negative re-enforcement is repugnant to modern sensibilities, it exemplifies the standard training methods of the day.

Taming the Tiger. Wild-Beast Training as a "Regular Business"—Its Principles and Its Practice. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Chicago, Illinois, 17 December 1877, p. 7. Reprinted from the *New York Herald*.

He did not look a bit like a hero. He was a short, rather

thin, rather pale, sad-eyed, middle-aged man, with light hair and rather reddish mustache, and he walked toward the cage of wild animals, containing four full-grown tigresses (near which the writer was standing), with the



spiritless, and mechanical air of an attendant to whom a full-grown tigress was an every-day spectacle. The time was 8:30 o'clock in the evening, and the place was the rear of Gilmore's garden, now occupied by the London circus, this particular portion of the inclosure being devoted to the menagerie.

The short, thin, pale, sad-eyed man approached slowly, stooped to pass under the bars which divide the cage of the tigers from the mass of humanity, and then quietly commenced to clean the cage containing the huge beasts, disturbing occasionally, as he did so with his broom, the occupants, who, however, seemed to pay as little attention to him as he paid apparently to them, although they could have "clawed" him at any moment. Thinking him to be an ordinary attaché of the circus, the writer said to the man, half jesting: "You seem to know the beasts pretty well; but do you think you know them well enough to trust your hand inside the cage, as you do your broom?"

"Well, I should hope I did," replied the man quietly, "seeing as I will have to trust my whole body inside the cage in a few minutes."

The writer looked at the sad-eyed man in wonder for a minute, then "the situation" broke upon him. This meek little man, whom he had been taking for a subaltern, was the king himself, the tiger tamer, the man whose regular business it was to go twice a day into a cage holding four full-grown tigresses, any one of which four could kill and eat him at any moment. The meek little fellow was indeed a specialist—a specialist whose line was truly peculiar, and, therefore, truly interesting. Not one man in a million can enter a tiger's den, as a regular thing, and come out of it again.

The particular tiger tamer who gave this particular information was named Alfred Still, and was born in London of German parentage. He drifted, when a boy, into a situation with a man who bought and sold wild animals, and then, joining a traveling circus, wandered in

attendance on a pair of lions. The number of lions was then increased to seven, and with these kings of the desert Mr. Still became thoroughly familiar from the outside of the cages.

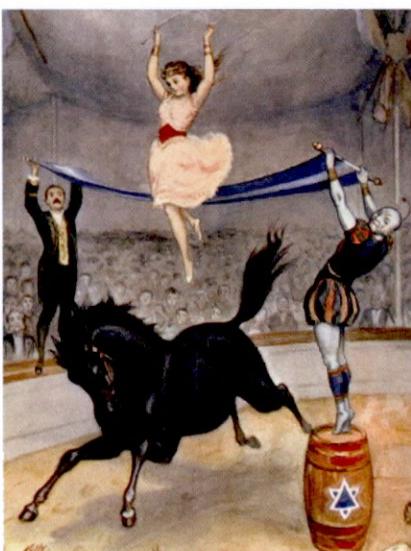
A DEBUT IN A DEN OF LIONS.

The first time he entered the den to make them perform was, of course, a memorable epoch of his life. "I expected to be torn or cut by the beasts," said Mr. Still, alluding to his portion of this experience, "and I was very nervous. I expected to come out of the cage bleeding, if not dying, and I made up my mind that if anything happened to me this first time it should be my last time; I would never repeat the attempt. But my employers said that if I got in any trouble with the lions they would see me through my hospital expenses and would continue my wages. So, although I shook all over inside, I looked as bold as a lion, and I went in the cage before the crowd just as if I had been used to it. The lions behaved first rate. I made my performance pretty short, was congratulated by my employers, and have never been afraid of a beast since."

"You must have known some famous lion kings and tiger tamers in your time," remarked the writer.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Still, "I have met Tom Batty, Lucas, Crockett, and John Cooper. I worked for a while under Tom Batty. He was a good man in his way—didn't know what fear was, but somehow he had no luck with his lions; they were all the time fighting with him. Why, his body was all one mass of bites and scratches. He always came out of his tussles first best, though. He made a lion know that he was boss. Jack Cooper was a great lion tamer, too, but cool and quiet. He traveled in France with Myers' Circus. He was bitten very bad once, and was in the hospital for months. Crockett was a London favorite in his day, and then there was a Miss Dare who went into a lion's den. Dare was not her real name, but she deserved it, for she was daring, too daring, for once she forgot to watch her lions, and was nearly torn to pieces in consequence. As for poor Lucas, he was killed by his lions at last—torn into bits right in the cage. He was performing his animals, and lost his temper with them, a thing no man should ever do with a wild beast, and whipped them too much. They turned on him suddenly, and then there was an end of Lucas, just as there is an end to most of us fellows some day or other, for one-half at least of the men who make wild beasts perform are finished by them. I suppose I will enter a cage once too often myself." No wonder he was a sad-eyed man, with such views of his probable ultimate destiny.

"Once a young man, who had been hanging around the tiger cages for a long while doing chores, took it into his head that he could 'perform' the animals, and probably he could have done so. The beasts had got used to seeing him around and knew his voice. But the moment he entered the cage he lost his courage, he showed signs of fear, and the tigers found it out in a twin-



kling—the beasts know by instinct if you fear them or not—and if I had not rushed in just then he would have been torn limb from limb; one of the tigers was just getting ready to bite his neck when I calmed him down."

TREACHERY OF WILD BEASTS.

According to the best beast trainers, no wild beast can ever be trusted, not even the so-called "noble" lion. They are all treacherous, the females generally being more deceitful and dangerous than the males. The lioness is more difficult to manage than the lion, the tigress than the tiger. Kindness—that is anything but ordinary kindness or "civility"—is absolutely thrown away upon a wild beast. It has occasionally some little effect upon a lion, but really very seldom, the lion being really a surly and treacherous brute, all lion stories and talk to the contrary notwithstanding. But with a tiger, and especially a tigress, all affection is literally wasted. "A tigress is as likely to eat you up after six years of attention on her as after six days, if she only fancies she is safe in so doing. In all professional intercourse with wild animals you must depend on fear—only absolute fear. Let the beasts know that you can and will beat them when they deserve it and they will not hurt you.

"Never trust them for a moment, keep your eye on them all the time—not that your eye alone will have any effect upon them. All these stories in books about 'eyeing animals' into submission and the power of the human eye over the brute creation are sheer fabrications. And as a rule, the whip is the most efficacious of instruments in training or subduing a wild beast. It can be used quickly and at once and it hurts every time. So the beasts learn to dread it even more than a gun—more than anything save a red hot bar or a fire. I depend more on my whip when I go in among my tigers," said the reporter's informant, "than upon myself. If I were to drop my whip the beast would fancy I had lost all my power, and pounce first upon the whip, then upon me. I would consider the dropping of my whip while in the cage with my animals as almost a fatal calamity.

"To train a wild animal," said Mr. Still, "you must first make his or her acquaintance from the outside, doing chores around the cage and getting the animals acquainted with your face, and, above all, with your voice. They remember voices more acutely than they do faces; they are governed more by sound than by sight. Once I had a beast in my cage that had not seen me in my red suit that I wear when performing. When I entered with it on the brute did not recognize me, and would undoubtedly have sprung on me and torn me to pieces had I not shouted to her in my ordinary tone of voice. She remembered me at once and slunk down submissive."

FEEDING THE ANIMALS.

The trainer feeds his beasts and gives them water. These acts give him no hold on their gratitude, but they

serve to render his face, form, and voice familiar. They serve as an introduction to tiger sagacity. But you must always watch your beasts well, whether outside or inside the cage.

Having got accustomed to your beasts and your beasts accustomed to you, your next step is to train them to do their tricks. These tricks are very simple, but they require a good deal of time, and a good deal of whipping to accomplish.

The lions are the smartest of the wild beasts. You can train a lion to do the ordinary tricks in trade-jumping through hoops and over gates, standing on hind legs, and so on—in about five weeks of constant work. In this timetable of wild beasts you can estimate that it would take a lioness about a week longer, and a leopard, which comes next in intelligence to a lion, about six weeks to learn the same feats. The tiger would take about seven or eight weeks, a tigress about eight or nine weeks, while you can keep on beating and teaching a hyena for about four months before you can do much with him.

The most difficult task of all to teach a wild beast is to teach him how to let you lie on him without his eating you. "I do this every night with one of the tigresses, but she don't like it a bit, though she keeps quiet enough, for it aggravates her inwardly.

ONE GREAT SUCCESS.

"The great secret of tiger taming and all wild beast taming," continued the tiger tamer, "lies in the whipping of the animals—knowing just when to whip them—and just how much. You must keep them well whipped, but if you whip them either too little or too much, or whip them without cause, it might be fatal. As for positively taming a wild beast you can't do it—especially a tiger. One or two men may have more or less influence over an animal, but

no one is absolutely safe with them, and no wild beast was ever absolutely tamed. Food makes but little difference with any wild beast as to its natural ferocity, and with a tiger it makes none at all. My animals would tear a man limb from limb after a full meal just for the fun of the thing. On the other hand, I would just as leave enter their cage before a meal as after it; in fact, I do enter it to perform just before feeding time in the afternoon. Once I was obliged to keep them without food for four days, crossing from England to France, and yet

I performed them before I fed them on the fourth day. On Sunday we do not feed the tigress at all, so as to keep them from sour stomach and indigestion; yet on Monday before feeding time I perform them. The mere amount of food has very little to do with their behavior. Thirst excites them more than hunger. Each of my tigers drinks about a pall of water a day and consumes about ten pounds of meat.

"There is this difference between a tiger and lion," said our encyclopedia of wild beast lore. "A lion will tear you



out of spite and temper occasionally, but a tiger attacks you only for sheer love of blood. A tiger's claws, too, are even sharper than a lion's. The leopard's claws are less sharp, while a hyena's foot is like a dog's, clawless, the hyena's strong point being, like a scolding woman, in the jaw."

Having now pretty well exhausted the subject of wild beast taming and training, a concluding word may here be said as to the pay of the professional wild-beast tamer. This is much smaller than is generally supposed, ranging from \$150 to \$100 a month. Considering the risks of life and limb these men daily take, and the fact that there are not fifty of them altogether in the world, this would seem scanty compensation. But the men themselves seemed satisfied, and there appears to be a wild bizarre fascination about this wild beast life, which, like the love of art in a fine artist, is its own, even if it is often its only reward.

Elise Dockrill was one of the greatest female riders in circus history. This interview, given while she was with the Howe's Great London Circus, is particularly revealing.

Story of a Circus Rider, *New Orleans Times*, New Orleans, Louisiana, 30 December 1877, p. 5 [From the New York Sun].

Last evening after Mme. Dockrill had finished the four horse bareback act, as she was acknowledging the applause of the audience in the amphitheatre, the ringmaster gave an extra flourish of his whip, which started the last horse leaving the enclosure. He turned quickly, fell on his side, and striking out kicked the fair equestrienne severely on the shin. She fell, but was up in a second, as was the horse.

I chanced to be one of the spectators, and it at once occurred to me that if this woman who nets \$20,000 a year by the skillful use of her limbs and feet on her horses' backs, should happen to break one of her legs, the public would be interested to know it.

Fortunately, although the blow was hard and the pain acute, no bone was broken, and Madame was able to walk slowly home. She is a native of France, about thirty years old, tall, slender, pleasant-looking, domestic in her tastes, and very quiet in manner. I met her after the performance with her husband, who has charge of the ring during her acts, and availed myself of the opportunity to ask her a few questions.

She says she is extremely fond of her business, and could never be happy if she were to leave it.

"How long," said I, "have you been in the circus?"

"Ever since I was a child. My father and all our family were circus people, and I was about our horses from my earliest days."

"When did you begin to ride?"

"I rode when I was five years old, but I began public bareback riding when I was thirteen."

"Was it difficult at first?"

"Very, and I had to practice so much; but afterward it became second nature. I train my own horses. They know me, and I them. They would allow no one else to ride them. Mr. Stickney tried these four, but he could do nothing with them."

"Are they very valuable?"

"Oh, yes. I wouldn't sell the one on which I do my principal act for any money. I was offered \$2000 for him in Cincinnati, but such an offer is absurd. I have seven, all told. They work like a charm together."

"Why is it that these bareback horses are always gray?"

"That's because the rosin shows less on a gray horse."

"What is the rosin for?"

"It is necessary, especially if our shoes are new or stiff."

"You formerly played in Europe?"

"I have played all over the world and before all the crowned heads. I like to ride in the Spanish and French rings, but the Americans are very encouraging, also. In California they are very enthusiastic. Here in New York the people have seen all the great artists, and one has to be extra good to please them, but on the road they have not seen so many although they seem to be very discriminating there as well."

I notice that in your principal act you use or do not use the reins, at pleasure, but in the four-horse act you use them all the time. Why is that?"

"The single horse is trained. He does just so with or without the reins, but I need the reins with the four horses to give them their cues. I regulate their going ahead, coming back, and forming in procession by the rein alone."

"Do you ever feel afraid or nervous when riding?"

"Never. I don't think of myself at all. I simply say to myself, this is your work, you have it to do, and do it. I always try to do my best, rain or shine—here where we have a beautiful ring, or on the road with the mud in the ring six inches deep."

"Weren't you nervous when before the crowned heads of whom you spoke?"

"Not a bit. Why? Some riders are always nervous. It's temperament. As for me, I never once think of myself."

"Can't you play better to a full house?"

"No sir. It is pleasant to see a full house for the sake of the manager, but it makes no difference."

"Do you become excited by the noise and hi-his?"

"Not in the least. I make a noise and hi-hi, too, but all the time I am attending to my business."

"You had a pretty hard kick to-night?"

"Yes. I was taken by surprise. I was making my compliments to the audience when I felt the blow. I couldn't think what it was till I saw the horse on the ground. He hurt my shin badly. I shall rub it with liniment, and do it up in Pond's Extract."



"Have you had many blows and falls?"

"Oh, yes. I broke my ankle twice and my arm four times. Last season I lay in the ring unconscious a long time, but those things are to be expected."

"How long have you been married?"

"Twelve years."

"Fortunately your husband is in the business, too, or you wouldn't have much domestic life."

"Oh, I have a lovely home in Bordeaux, France, and three little children."

"Boys?"

"Girls; all three girls; the eldest is nine years old. One of my babies was born in the height of our season. I had been riding that very day. I wish I could see them, but it doesn't do to travel with children in this business."

"Then you don't propose to put them in the ring?"

"Oh, yes. They are all wild about horses already. These laws about child performers keep us from putting them in the ring as once. We teach them the business all the same, and some day bring them out."

"What do you and the horses do at the close of the season?"

"Rest and practice."

"Where?"

"Well, there are two places, one in New Jersey and one on Long Island. I used to go out every day to practice. I train my own horses, and sometimes it's very difficult to find a place where a ring can be made. I let the horses rest a month, and then train them."

"Rest from what?"

"From hard work. These acts do not occupy much time, but they are very exacting and the horses suffer exceedingly."

"And you?"

"Sometimes I am literally exhausted, for instance, in my principal act—"

"Why do you call it principal?"

"Because there are difficult things to do in it. It's the technical name for the first and show act. In that act I go through forty or fifty balloons, jumping from my feet and falling on my knees. The physical strength used up in that is tremendous."

"In twenty years you have demolished a great many balloons, haven't you? Counting matinees, you have averaged sixty balloons a day for six months in every year. That would be--60 per day for 30 days 1800; 1800 per month for six months 10,800; 6 months a year in 20 years 216,000 or a grand total of 216,000 balloons."

"Yes," laughingly replied Madame Dockrill, "that would make a large pile of paper wouldn't it?"

As she said this, a terrible scream was heard in the direction of the monkey's cage. Mr. Parks [the show manager] and the rest ran over and found that a venerable monkey had inadvertently pushed his paw through the bars of the next cage, after which he fell asleep. A mischievous monkey watched the paw, saw its owner enter the land of Nod, and, seizing it in his teeth, bit it through and through. Mr. Parks struck the biter several severe blows with a heavy stick before he released the paw, at which the sufferer fell back in his cage, and fainted dead away.

Resuming the conversation with Madame Dockrill, I

asked her if she needed help at any time in the ring as it was noticed that her husband, in a dress coat and lavender tights, was always present.

"Oh, no," said she. "I depend on my own nerve. I never think of anybody or anything. I shout and hurrah and all that, but I keep my own head on my business, watch my horse, and do what I have done a thousand times before."

"Then the attention of individuals, the flattery of acquaintances has no effect, no stimulating boost, as it were?"

"Not at all. Mr. Dockrill is always with me. He has his menage act on a horse which formerly belonged to Napoleon III. It was taken from his stables. Mr. Dockrill bought it and trained it, and rode it in six weeks' time. It's a great thing to get a good horse."

"Yes, indeed," said big Bliss. "Charley Fish, the greatest male bareback rider in the world, has been offering big prices for a horse this [past] six years, and couldn't get one. I found him one last week in a baker's cart. You ought to see him; he's as tickled as Punch."

So far as my observation goes, Mme. Dockrill is the one rider who is contented with her profession.

All the rest are ambitious to act.

Charles W. Fish, whose riding in the London circus is a thing of beauty, grace and skill, is crazy on the subject. One can't be in his company ten minutes before he pulls out a play in which he intends appearing, and in which he believes he will make a hit.

Miss Watson, another bareback rider, is afflicted with the same complaint.

They all belong to the "profession," and expect sooner or later to shine upon the mimic stage.

It is notorious that all the clowns believe themselves actors already. Like the minstrels they abhor original jokes, and stick to the same old Joe Millers that their predecessors used. "This is my finger and this is my thumb," says the clown as he punches two holes in a balloon. And as no audience was ever known to decline to laugh at it, the inference is that it is funny.

The clowns in the London circus say it with conscientious regularity.

Mme. Dockrill is beyond the help of anybody's praise. For years she has drawn a weekly salary of \$300. She now has \$350, and next season will receive \$400. In addition to this large sum, she has the care and feed of seven horses and two grooms. It is estimated that her horses, costumes, and general furnishing for her business are worth \$50,000 to \$75,000. I am unable to understand why the first act should be called the "principal." In the second she drives four horses, manipulating and directing them in surprising maneuvers, and part of the time straddles all four of them, one foot resting on the outer flank of the horse at the extreme right, the other on the flank of the one at the extreme left.

I asked her if she found it difficult to do that.

"No," said she, "practice has made it all easy; but I must practice."

"Does Mr. Dockrill get your horses under control for you before you train them?"

"Mr. Dockrill attends to his horses and I to mine."

Mr. Dockrill is, I believe, a partner in the London Circus. He was once a bareback rider, too, but now man-

ages the ring and looks out for Madame. He is a Frenchman, perhaps thirty-five or forty of age, very polite, and apparently candid. His admiration for Madame is something pleasant to see. He never leaves her alone with others. She is a valuable property, and he takes the best of care of her. I should judge, in spite of the denunciations of Brother Talmage, that Mr. and Mrs. Dockrill are more quiet in their manner and more devoted in their regard than the majority of public men and women. And yet their life is one of boisterousness, hi-hi's, and constant excitement.

To all appearances, when on her fleet-footed steeds, standing on tip toe with one leg pointing toward the setting stars, Madam Dockrill was on the verge of delirium.

In less than ten minutes thereafter she had doffed her plume and spangles, and as she rubbed her aching leg coolly canvassed the respective merits of Hogg's liniment and Pond's extract.

The fact is we don't always judge correctly.

The stale jokes told by talking clowns were forever condemned by newspapers, their scorn often expressed in a jocular manner.

The Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Wisconsin, 23 May 1878, p. 6.

The average age of a circus joke is 100 years. One died in Washington last week at the advanced age of 113.

New Hampshire Sentinel, Keene, New Hampshire, 3 October 1878, p. 4.

It is the experience of circus proprietors that one stock of clown's jokes will outlast seven sets of canvas covering.

Galveston Daily News, Galveston, Texas, 8 June 1879, p. 2.

At the last meeting a claim was laid before the city council for services rendered during the cholera epidemic of 1866. This is rather old, but we have a wonderful climate. Some things, like a circus joke, never die from old age.

Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 6 November 1879, p. 3.

In a circus at Paris, Ill., a suddenly crazed young lady ran into the ring, embraced the clown, and declared that he must become her husband. The audience said that it was the first original joke that they had heard in a circus for more than twenty-five years. Norristown Herald.

Parker the lion was certainly the most famous of his species in the 1860s and 1870s when he was the original "living lion loose in the streets," a widely-copied and wildly-popular parade feature in which a lion, usually secured only by a leash held by the trainer or in some cases a young lady, was seated atop a tableau wagon, majestically surveying his domain.

"Parker" is Dead," *The Janesville Gazette*, Janesville, Wisconsin, 11 January 1879, p. 4.

"Parker" is dead. The old lion, who season after season, has been gazed upon by hundreds and thousands who have crowded to see Burr Robbins' circus and menagerie, is no more. Yesterday afternoon he breathed his last, old

age and its infirmities having weakened him so that death had an easy victory over him. He was a very large animal and was among the first performing lions ever exhibited in this country. He was among the first ever tamed by [James] Crockett, who conceived the idea that lions could be made to submit to the rule of man, an idea which was sneered at by even his friends. Crockett however insisted on making the trial, and in spite of the warnings of friends entered the cage occupied by "Parker," and other lions. "Parker" pounced upon him and a fierce struggle ensued but Crockett came forth as conqueror. The lion got his revenge on man, however, and in 1862 he broke from his cage in Astley's amphitheater in London, where he was on exhibition, and pouncing upon Jarvey, who was Crockett's assistant, seized the poor man's throat with his fangs, and sucked the life blood from his victim. Not content with having killed his keeper, he tossed his limp and lifeless body to and fro, as a cat would a dead mouse. When Crockett appeared on the scene "Parker" was still infuriated by the taste of human blood and a fierce struggle ensued. Crockett procured blankets and saturating them with spirits, fastened them to long poles and set fire to them. By thrusting these hot flames into the very face of the wild lion, the animal was frightened and made to skulk back into his cell where he was secured. "Parker" was afterwards safely housed in the Zoological Garden at London, where he was visited by hundreds. The lion was brought to this country in 1863 in connection with the [Great] European circus, and at the sale of that concern in 1872 was purchased by Mr. Robbins, who has owned him since. "Parker" has felt the infirmities of age for some months, and it has been with some difficulty, toward the last of the season, that he could mount the cage, on top of which he was always posed during the street parades. For the past few weeks he has grown feebler, and though his appetite kept good, the food did not seem to strengthen him, and worn out he at last closed his record.

By the 1870s games of chance were a common sight on circus grounds. Most victims were not as lucky as this man in the second account who lost \$1000 in W. W. Cole's side show, nor were most local law enforcement officials as persistent and dedicated as the Watertown deputy sheriff.

Galveston Daily News, Galveston, Texas, 24 June 1879, p. 3.

Two old men complain to a contemporary that they were each swindled out of \$500 in the gambling department of the side-show of a circus. We fail to perceive that the aged sinners, or any persons who lose their money in gambling houses, merit much sympathy. They expect to win the gambler's money, but lose their own. Their intention is to get other men's money without an equivalent, and they are fleeced of theirs without a consideration. In the case referred to it happened that the professional sharpers were sharper than "the two respectable old citizens." That is all. Where is the difference? Those who enter gambling dens knowingly, and for the purpose of gambling, are just as desirous to win as the professional gambler, but they do not know how to do so well. Amateur gamblers who greedily pocket other people's treasure upon the turn of a card, are just as wicked as

professional gamblers, and if the latter usually win, it is only because the professional, as a rule, beats the amateur at everything.

In Limbo, *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 7 July 1879, p. 4.

On Saturday afternoon Mr. Cunningham, deputy sheriff of Watertown, arrested the ticket-seller and doorkeeper of a side-show with Cole's circus on charge of swindling a man named Cole of Watertown, an uncle of Oscar Cole, formerly in the livery business here, out of a thousand dollars. The names the two young men go by are Dr. Higbie and Mike Longmeyer. The story which deputy sheriff Cunningham of Watertown tells of the transaction is as follows: The show visited Watertown on June 18th [?]. A capper giving his name as Bell, and claiming to be in business at Milwaukee, discovered Mr. Cole on the grounds and took him into the side show where he was made to come from the same place and was undoubtedly a "distant relation" of Mr. Cole, the proprietor of the show, who would be only too glad to meet him. The capper successfully got Cole into the side-show and behind the screen, where the bungo business was going on. Capper engaged in the game and won, of course, every time. At length a stake of \$1000 was proposed. Could Mr. Cole advance the money to make the venture? Sure thing, of course. Cole, like many others, fell into the trap, went to the bank, drew \$1000, put it up and of course lost it. Not until ten days afterwards did he report the swindle to the authorities. Deputy Sheriff Cunningham started out to follow the show and by traveling with it a few days discovered that the "bungo" men, elated at their success in this state, and having raked in a good many thousands, had got scared and left. The only recourse left was to arrest the two men who apparently were managing the side show. This was done Saturday afternoon and the two men placed in jail. During the afternoon and evening there was a perfect swarm of circus men to the jail to see the two men, and among them Mr. Cole, a son of the proprietor of the show [actually the boyish-looking Cole was the proprietor], who used every effort to have the men released, but without avail. Mr. Cunningham started this morning with his men for Watertown, and Mr. Cole, son of the proprietor, accompanied them. As the side-show is a part of the main concern and all run under one management, Mr. Cunningham stated before leaving that he would arrest Mr. Cole, for conducting a swindling institution, upon his arrival at Watertown.

Newspaper articles in the 1870s, especially ones in small town papers, were generally poorly written, infested with bad grammar, irregular spelling, overused punctuation, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and worst of all, a near-universal lack of wit. Humor is a poor time traveler. This last citation is a blessed exception which is still funny and clever after nearly 130 years. Covering pretty much all the boorish and brutish behavior commonly observed on circus lots, this cockeyed advice throws considerable light on the nature of circus day.

Circus Chat. A Few Valuable Hints to the Uninitiated. Paste This in Your Hat, *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 2 June 1879, p. 4.

The circus will be here to-morrow and a few suggestions may be of incalculable value to the uninitiated.

1. Get to town by 5:30 a. m. If you get in any later go to the auditor's office and file an excuse.

2. Get drunk before 9:00 a. m., and put in a full day. That's what a circus is for.

3. If the marshal remonstrates with you, tell him to emigrate, tell him you're an untamed wild cat and invite him to chaw your mane. If he touches you, have him arrested.

4. If you see a three card monte man, go for him and bet your pile. He's probably some greenhorn that don't know his game. You can skin him in a holy minute. Bet on the card with the corner turned down, always.

5. If you see a boy on the street distributing circulars shoot him on the spot. He's some pickpocket trying to get close enough to you to snatch your pocket book. You might make a mistake, but it don't matter. There are too many boys around anyhow.

6. If you have any friends with you join hands and forward three. If any body wants to get around you, let them take the street. This is a free country and you've got more rights in it than anyone else, anyhow.

7. Before you go to the circus call at the Sentinel office for an hour or two and tell the editors some good stories that you saw in the papers; the editor has nothing else to do and will like it very much. He never gets to see the papers either.

8. When you get in the museum tent grab the rope before the curiosities and stand as still as the angel of death. Don't move on. You paid 50 cents to get in there, and now stay if it breaks a tug. It ain't your fault that you got there first.

9. When you get into the menagerie, if the attendant at the door tells you to go to the right, tell him to go to the devil, you paid to get in there and can go anywhere you've a mind to. If you want to climb the centre-pole backwards it's none of his business. At any rate, go in the opposite direction.

10. In the circus, get a seat close to the band. Spread your feet over the seat below. You can lie down if you want to; that's what that half dollar was for. Keep your hat on and stand up often. When you stand take your hat off and hold it in your hand. If anybody tells you to sit down ask them what's the matter with them. Chew tobacco all the time, and fire the juice on the next fellow's coat tail. If there are any ladies near you, that's the place to deposit your juice. Don't forget to cheer often.

11. When the circus is over, go to the ticket wagons and demand your money back. They agree to do that if you are not satisfied. Go up town and tell everybody you meet that the show wasn't worth a darn. Get as drunk as you can again; whoop around town till midnight; then go home, if you feel like it, and the next circus that comes to town, repeat the dose.



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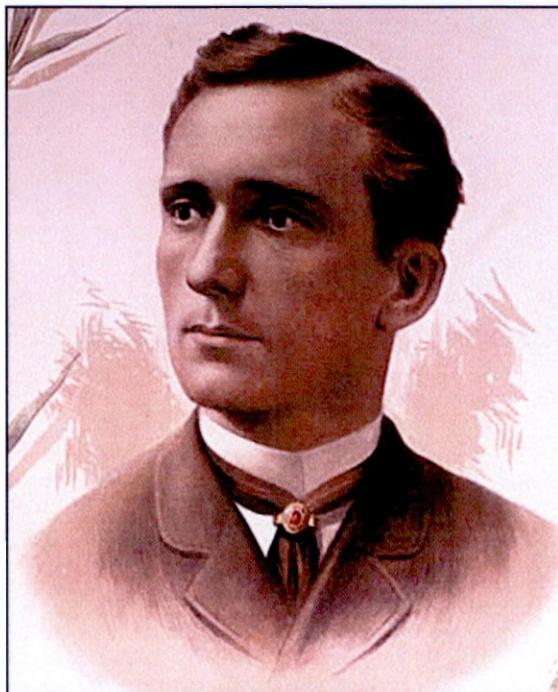
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Nate Salsbury's Black America: A Gigantic Exhibition Of Negro Life and Character

By Richard A. Georgian

This paper was presented at the 2007 Circus Historical Society Convention in Las Vegas. The events described took place in an American society different from today. The author has kept the language of the period for historical accuracy.

The embryonic beginning for Nate Salsbury's 1895 Black America extravaganza can be found in the brilliant staging of the Buffalo Bill Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World at the 1893 World's Columbus Exposition in Chicago. William F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, and Nate Salsbury, Cody's business partner, had the highest known profits in show business in 1893, estimated between \$700,000 and \$1,000,000 (equivalent to \$30,000,000 today). Salsbury, Cody, and Major John Burke, Cody's press agent and sidekick, planned to use part of their profit to bring the midway attractions from the Chicago exposition to New York City. The scheme was to bring The German village, the African (Dahomey)¹ village, the Old Cairo Street, the Irish village, the cliff dwellers, and Ferris's wheel to New York along with their Wild West exhibition. Salsbury and Burke traveled back and forth between Chicago and New York during August and September of 1893 for discussions with John Wolfe Ambrose, President of a syndicate which owned the South Brooklyn Ferry and Terminal Company.² Ambrose had a large man-made lot in South Brooklyn and needed a tenant. Salsbury needed a lot large enough to display their attractions. Salsbury and Ambrose struck a multi-year lease deal for the lot extending from Thirty-Second to Thirty-Ninth Street, and Second to Third Avenue, embracing twenty-two



Nathan Salsbury (1846-1902). John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital collection.

acres.³ Cody and Salsbury had the signed agreement with Ambrose and therefore continued preparations on the lot. Lew B. Parker (actor, playwright, and set designer) supervised the construction of a magnificent grandstand and arena on their leased Brooklyn lot during the winter of 1893-1894. The permit issued covered a grandstand 360 feet long by 450 feet deep and 38 feet high. It was one story in height and horseshoe shaped, the prongs reaching toward Second Avenue (facing Upper New York Bay) and thoroughly protected from the elements with every seat under cover. It reportedly cost \$10,000 and seated 15,000.⁴ The arena was immense, 312 feet by 455 feet. Cody and Salsbury invested heavily to prepare the lot for the mid-

way attractions including a ten-foot corrugated steel fence surrounding the lot.

The contracts for the Chicago Exposition midway attractions, including Mr. Ferris's wheel, fizzled out. Buffalo Bill's Wild West entertained more than 1.5 million people during the season from Saturday, May 12 to Saturday, October 6, 1894. Cody and Salsbury's infrastructure investment for the 1894 Wild West exhibition season, coupled with Cody's dubious investments, founding Cody, Wyoming, building a cemetery and fairground in North Platte, Nebraska, paying off the debt of five North Platte churches, acquiring a Wisconsin newspaper, and supporting the actress Katherine Clemons, resulted in financial disaster. Cody and Salsbury were forced to negotiate with James A. Bailey, who acquired a 50% interest in the Buffalo Bill Wild West, and took the exhibition on the road in 1895.

Salsbury and Cody were stuck with a magnificent grandstand and a lease on the Brooklyn, Ambrose Park lot.

Lew Parker related a story on how Black America came about: "This show was conceived in the Actor's Club in New York. Several showmen well known in the show business were discussing different shows for the future. Mr. Nate Salsbury . . . talked of an all colored musical show to tour America and then Europe. The other men said it could not be done, and Nate Salsbury said, 'I will show you fellows it can.'"⁵ Black America, a "Gigantic Exhibition of

Negro Life and Character," was born in 1895. It played in Brooklyn from May 25th to July 7th, and Boston from July 16th to September 4th before becoming a traveling show.

In the spring of 1895 the old Wild West stomping grounds were converted into a pre-Civil War southern plantation. Where once cowboys and Indians fought, buffalo roamed, and Buffalo Bill saluted the citizens of New York in an arena, there were now slave cabins and tents framing a stage. The stage facing the grandstands depicted a wharf landing measuring 120 feet by 134 feet, and raked to elevate the singers in the rear. Upstage, a drop depicted a steamboat landing with a side wheel river steamer moored to a wharf and mountains in the background. Sugar, molasses barrels and cotton bales stood on the landing. To one side of the stage the planter's dwelling was painted on canvas while the verandah in relief served as the musician's pit. On an immense electrical frame portraits of famous historical figures were displayed for the grand finale. The old living quarters of Cossacks, Arabs, Germans, other nationalities, and the Indian tepees were replaced with 150 slave log cabins used to quarter the cast.

The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported:⁶ "The Negroes seem to take a great deal of pride in their new homes, and over nearly every door are signs such as 'Pilgrims from Savannah,' 'Four Little Atlanta Girls,' 'The Eighth Ward Club of Philadelphia' and 'Home of the Tar Heelers.'

An acre of planted cotton re-created the Southern plantation atmosphere. "Several blacks, working an old-fashioned cotton gin, would gin, bale and press some of the cotton, and then unbale it before the next show." Four old men, former slaves, ran the cotton press and had little in



A Buffalo Bill poster advertising Ambrose Park.

common with the younger members of the company. Robin Standback, one of these older men said: "I dismembers my age; I only know I was born 'fore Nat's war."⁷ Another of the old gentlemen was named Lewis who said: "I had three masters, and the second made my life a misery."⁸

Gardens and a tobacco exhibit were also situated on the grounds to demonstrate how the tobacco plant became a usable product. In another area stood a number of army tents housing an all black detachment.

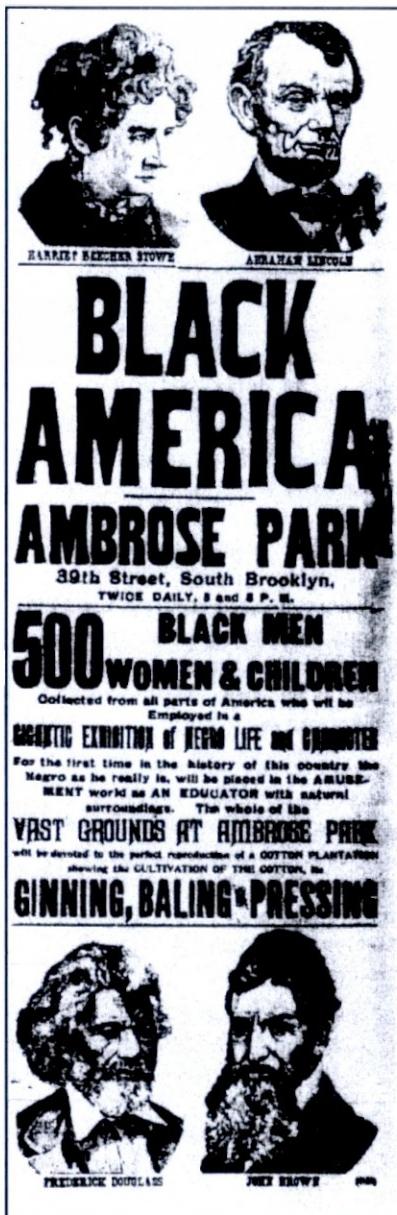
Albert Siegal and Nate Salsbury (right) in Salsbury's Ambrose Park office. Author's collection.



ment from the United States Ninth Cavalry. Part of the intended enjoyment of Black America lay in the opportunity to see a semblance of real plantation life, like part of the thrill for those who attended the Wild West resided in the opportunity to walk among the tents of the Indians and soldiers and observe those who made the history of the West.⁹

Here is an example of the stereotypical reporting reflecting the time and place. "All the good features of the old slave life are reproduced, and from what is to be seen it can readily be understood why such strong affection often existed between slave and their masters and mistresses. The immense cotton field, with the cotton ready for picking is an instructive sight. The happy, songful life that the old gray-headed negroes lead in preparing and pressing the cotton, aided by two diminutive mules, is indicative of the contented, lack-of-thought-for-the-morrow sort of life that existed in many sections of the South in the forties and fifties.¹⁰

"A fat black mammy, with a red handkerchief on her head, sits outside one of the little cabins, knitting. A dusky damsel, all in pale blue, makes a picture of herself standing in the square frame of an open cabin window, and she would



A Black America newspaper ad used in New York. Author's collection.

be apt to have overpowering effect upon any susceptible young man in the neighborhood. There are a great many men around, for there is a group of cabins over in the corner by the cotton field that is devoted to bachelor quarters only.¹¹

The spectators' took a picturesque sail of half an hour from New York City's Battery, using the South Brooklyn Ferry and Terminal Line to reach the lot. The lot opened at 11:00 o'clock and two performances were given, 3:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., with the first public performance

THE NEGRO AS A SOLDIER

Come and See the BEST DRILLED CAVALRY COMPANY in the UNITED STATES.

The Negro as a Musician
Come and hear THE CAPITOL BAND of WASHINGTON

The Negro as a Vocalist
Come and hear 250 NEGRO VOICES IN CONCERT

The Negro as a Dancer
Come and see 100 BUCK AND WING DANCERS

The Negro as an Athlete
Come and see 75 ATHLETIC MARVELS

The Negro as a Horseman
Come and see the WHIRLWIND HURDLE RACES

The Negro as an Actor
Come and see reproduction of LIFE IN AFRICA.

COME AND SEE THE **AMAZONS**

COME AND SEE THE **Creole Beauties of the South**

COME AND SEE THE **New Ambrose Park.**

COME TO THE **Perpetual Fountain of Mirth and Melodeon**

COME AND SEE THE **Magnificent Historical Pictures**

COME AND SEE THE **Negro Jugglers, Conjurors and Voodoo Dancers**

COME AND SEE THE **The Tobacco Factory in Full Operation**

COME AND SEE THE **Auction Block & Slave Pen**

COME AND SEE **"The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane"**

COME AND SEE THE **Soldiers Camp.**

COME AND HEAR **50 Quartettes--Male Voices**

COME AND HEAR **100 Solo Vocalists,**

COME AND HEAR **500 Negro Voices in Chorus**

COME AND SEE THE **Native African Dances**

COME TWICE AT 3 & 8 P.M.

COME AT POPULAR PRICES

GENERAL ADMISSION, 25¢

Reserved Special Seats, 50 & 75¢
COME EARLY. GATES OPEN AT 12 NOON

POPULAR PRICE RESTAURANT
On Grounds, always open and always good

held on Saturday, May 25, 1895. A restaurant on the grounds advertised "popular prices, always open and always good." The exhibition, the term used by Salsbury, ran for two hours, however, the audience requested encores and reprises and the performance would often run over by thirty minutes or more.

An individual paid twenty-five cents for general admission, which in Brooklyn and Boston included access to the southern plantation displays and the exhibition. The audience could purchase reserve seating for an additional twenty-five cents and up to one dollar for the center box seats.

What did the customers get for

their twenty-five cents? They saw a two hour performance like nothing ever seen before or since. The exhibition opened with the grand chorus parade of 200 to 400 voices marching onto the stage in plantation costumes. The men were decked out in white straw hats and the women wore red bandanas which gave a picturesque appearance and made a striking picture.¹² The chorus frequently sang: "These Bones Shall Rise Again," Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground," "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia," "Stand on the Walls of Zion," and "Roll, Jordon, Roll."¹³ The chorus size depended upon whether they were in New York, Boston or the cut down version taken on the road.

The program generally had three parts with singing and dancing as the principal entertainment. The newspapers are full of notices informing the public of program changes. The first part had musical numbers featuring such groups as Gilmore's famous band under the direction of Victor Herbert, or in Boston, Herr Emil Ascher's military band. The chorus and soloists, including Cordelia McClain, Madam Flowers, Julius Johnson, or Miss Bessie Lee, might sing favorites such as: "Fly, Fly, Fly," "Rise Up, You Lazy Coon," "See How I Laugh," "Way Down Yonder in the Cornfield," and "O, My Baby" during which the chorus rocked from side to side simulating the motion of a cradle. While the chorus sang "Watermelon Smiling on the Vine," an old white-haired actor rode on stage in a two-wheeled cart loaded with watermelon and drawn by a comically mismatched burro and calf. The stage erupted into a mad scramble as the participants tried to grab a melon, which one reporter described as "having more action than a football game." A few more songs like: "The Log Cabin Where I was Born" or "Evening by the Moonlight" and then while playing "Old Virginny" twenty couples performed a "Cakewalk." The idea for the Cakewalk was a couple promenading in a dignified, high stepping, kicking, prancing, and strutting manner to show off dance moves and acrobatics while mimicking whitey's high society. The cakewalk was once

described as more thrilling than a circus chariot race. Charles (Walker) Johnson and Dora Dean were star "Walkers" and audience favorites. The spectators, flabbergasted by the blacks' new dance steps, voted for their favorite team by applause while the master of ceremonies, George Wilson, lifted the cake behind each couple. The winner received the cake.

The second part contained more novelty acts. A troop of twenty-three ex-members of the Ninth (colored) cavalry performed maneuvers and saber drills. A camp-meeting revival scored well with the audience. Charles Johnson followed with an amusing acrobatic musical act assisted by singers in a marching chorus with three drum majors twirling batons. Black boxers displayed their skills and for comic relief they held boxing matches in barrels. David Hardy, a twenty year-old from Washington D.C., listed his occupations as private vocal and instrumental concerts with a Jew's-harp, and singing and dancing in a boxing ring. He was the featured boxer. There were black wire walkers, jugglers, runners and the world renowned contortionist Pablo Diaz, called the "Creole Corkscrew." Soloists Madam Cordelia, Harry Singleton, Julius Johnson, William Banks, Frank Nelson and Joe Somerville were interspersed between acts singing favorites such as: "Old Black Joe," "Kentucky Home," "Good Old Georgia," and "Raise the Roof To-night." Madam Flowers sang "When I Left Old Ireland," and Bessie Lee sang "The Cows are in the Clover." The Standard Quartette from Washington D.C. who first recorded in 1894, recorded "Who Broke the Lock" in 1895. The Oriole Quartette originated and sang "Brother Michael, Won't You Hand Down the

Rope." There were six other Quartettes and the Conservatory Warblers, The Twilight Choir, and the Old Dominion Club. The talent included a forty piece tambourine, trombone (bone) and banjo band applause. "Old Jeb Andrews picks up his banjo and starts a rattling jig. Then the finely formed and strong colored boys, who but a moment before were sprinkling jig sand to the words of a darky melody, begin to dance."¹⁴ The audience squealed

A Black America program for the Ambrose Park engagement. Author's collection.

"BLACK AMERICA"

PROGRAMME.

DAILY, 3 AND 8.15 P.M.

PART FIRST.

GRAND CONCERT BY

Gilmore's Famous Band

VICTOR HERBERT, Conductor.

22d REGIMENT OF NEW YORK.

AFTERNOON.		EVENING.	
1 MARCH—Der Obersteiger.....	Zeller	1 MARCH—El-Dorado.....	Herbert
2 OVERTURE—		2 OVERTURE—Merry Wives	
3 WALTZ Lost Luck (New).....	Güller	3 (a) SERENADE.....	Moskanski
4 FLUTE SOLO.....	Bouillet	4 SCENES FROM MIGNON.....	Thomas
MR. JULIUS SPINDLER.		Prince Amalias..... Herbert	
5 REMINISCENCES OF IRELAND.....	Godfrey	5 ALBION: or, The Rose, Thistle and Shamrock..... Baetens	
6 GAVOTTE—La Princesse.....	Czibulka	7 POLKA MAZURKA—Obersteiger..... Zeller	
7 INTERMEZZO FROM NAILA.....	Delibes	8 GRAND ARMY PATROL..... Fanchon	
8 MARCH—22d Regt.....	Herbert		

PART SECOND.

"Showing the Afro-American in all his phases, from the simplicity of the southern field hand (especially the phenomenal melody of his voice), to his evolution as the northern aspirant for professional musical honors."

THE CHORAL PORTION OF THE "BLACK AMERICA" COMPANY IN A GRAND CONCERT

"DEBEE'S A JUBILEE" and Songs by

THE ONE QUARTETTE	THE AMERICAN QUARTETTE
THE KEYSTONE QUARTETTE	CONSERVATORY WARBLERS
THE RUSSELL QUARTETTE	THE STANDARD QUARTETTE
The GOLDEN GATE QUARTETTE	THE TWILIGHT CHOIR
THE ORIOLE QUARTETTE	OLD DOMINION CLUB

with delight as the blacks introduced them to Buck and Wing dancing, the predecessor of today's tap dancing. The Buck and Wing combined Levee Dancing, as the plantation owners called it, which consisted of Negro which played tunes to thundering slaves beating out rhythms and dancing on river boats, and the Southern Clog dance which originally was done in leather-soled shoes, but by 1895 was performed in wooden-soled shoes.

The novel entertainment closed with an act called "historical pictures." One by one mammoth electrical portraits, 10 feet wide and 20 feet tall, were exposed to view. As these were lit up the chorus sang an appropriate song with each picture; Abraham Lincoln, "America"; General Grant, "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp the Boys are Marching"; General Sherman, "Marching through Georgia"; Fredrick Douglas, "Poor Old Slave"; John Brown, "John Brown's Body"; and a portrait of Harriet Beecher Stowe.¹⁵

To generate patronage Salsbury introduced a Sunday performance on June 10th. The Sunday shows contained spiritual hymns like "Rock of Ages," and "Nearer my God, to Thee." Salsbury used the time honored circus parade to bring about more enthusiasm, arranging for 485 members of the colored chorus to parade from Fifty-Eighth Street down Fifth Avenue to Twenty-Third Street.¹⁶ The *New York Times* reported: "The parade attracted great attention, particularly from the colored people of this city, who thronged the sidewalks and crowded into the gutters along the line of the parade from start to finish. A police detachment led the way, followed by a troop of colored cavalrymen on foot, then about thirty colored girls in white blouses and sailor

suits, who did what was called the Golden Key drill, then fifteen colored men in evening dress suits. The two prima donnas, Madam Flowers and Cordelia were conveyed in an open carriage as befitting their prominence. The chorus of colored people led by Julius Johnson followed singing plantation melodies, such as: 'Take Me Back Home,' 'Order of the Golden Key,' 'There's Little Consolation,' or 'Live Humble.' Bringing up the rear were a number of colored people wearing plantation costumes.¹⁷ The parade stopped in front of the Windsor, Waldorf, Brunswick, and Fifth Avenue Hotels to serenade patrons with songs such as: "Climb Up the Ladder," "Traveling Back to Dixie," and "Push Dem Clouds Away."

Capitalizing on the parade's success, Salsbury invited "every colored mother having a baby under 2 years old to appear with her offspring and inspect the antics of the colored brethren from the South." The *New York Times* headlined "Pickaninny Day at Ambrose Park," and a reporter wrote; "Raphael cherubs done in chocolate were thick as blackberries at Ambrose Park yesterday." The *New York Times* reporting in 1895 reeked with these types of racist, bigoted characterizations.

The *Brooklyn Eagle*, fortunately, has provided historians an unbiased critique of the music produced by the Black America singers: "No such chorus singing has been heard in the North because there has been no such body of singers. Here are four hundred or five hundred men and women on a platform in the center of the vast open space, where last year the Wild West Indians held forth, singing the Negro songs of the South and our national airs. They produce a volume of tone which a body of five thousand white singers would hardly equal and they sing with an innate sense of rhythm and an enthusiasm which all the training in the world can not produce. The Negro voice is a new instrument in music, having, particularly among the men, a quality of tone which can only be likened to the voice of a white chorus into which an infusion of brass had been assimilated. In time to come, when Negro choirs are available, com-

posers will take note of this as they would of the invention of a new instrument for their orchestra."¹⁸

The cast produced their unique sound under the musical direction of Mr. William (Billy) McCain. McCain was described as "a good looking, well dressed Negro with a big diamond blazing on his shirt front." McCain and his wife Cordelia, a principal singer, had a cottage opposite the main entrance with a sign reading "Mr. McClain musical director." In February of 1895, before joining the show, McClain, his wife Cordelia and Charles (Walker) Johnson played in "On the Mississippi," a melodrama in which they provided the colored comic relief. "William McClain was charged with assault on June 14, 1895 for punching and kicking his assailant, Mr. John Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins a colored agent for 'Black America' is credited with having exhibited symptoms of jealousy of McClain." The case was thrown out of court.¹⁹

Newspaper or other personal accounts of the over 500 cast members are nearly impossible to ferret out. The performers who have received any notice in print are scarce, but what has been uncovered

Performer Billy McClain. Author's collection.



is recorded here for future reference. (*The names that have been gleaned from news account are listed at the end of this paper.*)

Madam Flowers, a southern nightingale, starred in a Madison Square Garden production on March 2, 1895. A chorus of 100 voices and sixty couples competed in a cakewalk during the opening scene titled "An Hour on the Old Plantation."

The press reports were not always kind. Miss Bessie Lee of Philadelphia had a very sweet voice. "Three colored women, Mabel Foster, Lucy Johnson and Bessie Lee, were entertaining forty white men with a dance when the police broke in at 12:30 p.m. on April 29, 1895. All the white men were discharged but the three women were held over for examination."²⁰ Bessie Lee with several other future members of Black America participated at the Academy of Music "Cake Walk and Jubilee" in Brooklyn on May 11, 1895. The *Brooklyn Eagle* described the program and it could have been a dress rehearsal for Black America.

Harry Singleton, born in Oakland, California, March 10, 1845, was reported as the father of the 1890 system of colored concerts. He was also a well known actor employed in the Rusco & Swift minstrel show. Thomas Preesley, a banjoist, also traveled with Rusco & Swift.

The *Washington Post* published a racial article instructive on many levels. First, the article lists the names of some female performers, then provides stereotypical descriptions of them, casting them as types. The article began, "Nothing appeals more strongly to the average human being than beauty, particularly in woman."²¹ Julia Greene, a nineteen-year-old belle who came from Washington D.C., "is a Nubian type with a profile representing a series of symmetrical curves. Her eyes are large and expressive, and her teeth are white and regular." Gertie Evans, Blanch Davis, Nettie Eccles, and Martha Smith all of Washington D.C. were described as "Washington gals that are all livin' pictures." Nettie Eccles, 18 years old, was stabbed by her lover Charles Harrod, a member of the cast, on July 1, 1895. Ida

Prime, of Norfolk, "who is generally regarded as the belle of Ambrose Park is Oriental looking with an oval face, great lustrous eyes, regular features, and a beautifully-rounded figure. Her complexion is rather East Indian than African, and her hair is wavy instead of kinky. Maggie Jackson, another Norfolk girl, is a quadroon²² beauty, rather short but admirably proportioned. She has the large liquid eye of the Southern black, a mouth that many a white girl would be glad to have, and a straight, shapely nose, not too wide, yet not insignificantly small. Her hair is dark brown, crimped with a suggestion of kinkiness. Her red tinged cheeks contrasts pleasantly with her dusky complexion. Victoria Allen, of Richmond, and Mamie Furbe, of Norfolk are both undeniably pretty.

"Lightning struck one of the grandstand flagpoles at Ambrose Park on June 27, 1895. A number of the employees were standing in a group immediately under the pole, and each felt the shock. The fluid played along the wires connecting the electric lights, making a brilliant blaze for a few seconds. A large hole in the tin roof of the grandstand remains as a reminder."²³

Nate Salsbury on July 2nd informed the press "the show had been so successful he planned on

This newspaper ad appeared in the *Washington Post* on October 31, 1895. Fred Pfening III collection.

taking the show to London at the end of the season and afterwards it may be taken to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Rome."²⁴

Salsbury, who as a teenager started his acting career with juvenile parts in the Boston museum stock company, returned once more. He rented the Boston circus grounds on Huntington Avenue a few weeks after Buffalo Bill's Wild West left. He brought his New York crew over to Boston on July 7, after they closed in Ambrose Park. They built an open air stage 160 feet by 190 feet and erected the drops, lights, and other paraphernalia for the Black America exhibition. The artists arrived via steamer from New York and took up residence in tents on the grounds. The exhibition grounds opened on Wednesday, July 17, 1895 at 7:00 p.m., and the show started at 8:00 p.m. to an audience estimated at 7,000. The exhibition had most of the elements used at Ambrose Park with a slightly reduced cast.

Salsbury, Cody, James Bailey, Louis Cooke, Joseph McCaddon, Major John Burke, Michael Coyle and W.H. Gardner held a "counsel" at the Yates hotel in Syracuse, New York on August 5, 1895. They came together to compare notes and make plans for the remainder of the season. Salsbury returned to Boston and added a "Fireworks Carnival" to the conclusion of the performances from August 11th.

The press liked human interest stories and here are two examples from

Boston. "Old Jeb Andrews, a gray-haired, gray-whiskered Negro who strikes the banjo with his heavy stick during the buck and wing dancing, got the shock of his life in Boston. He was re-united with his daughter Harriet after 39 years. He had last seen her on a Memphis plantation where the family in the 1850's was auctioned from the block and became separated."²⁵ The other story involved an altercation on August 20th: "John Bradus, a performer, fired five shots at Edward Lucket, James Lucket and William Delanhey, who were also members of the troupe. Edward Lucket sustained a slight scalp wound, while the other two men were 'delicately touched by the bullets.' The trouble would not have been reported, except railroad employees witnessed the shooting and called the police. Bradus kept himself out of the way and the injured men refused to take legal action."²⁶

Colonel Daniel A. Keys of the show's ticket department died of a heart attack while seated in a barber's chair on September 3rd. The Boston run ended on September 4th. The company was reduced to between 250 and 300 performers. The exhibition took to the rails in coaches painted white emblazoned in large red letters Black America. "A special train of nine sleeping cars, a cooking and commissary car, baggage car, and a special car for the office force and Salsbury's private apartments was purchased."²⁷ The troupe played theaters, halls and auditoriums in Lynn, Lawrence, Haverhill, Worcester, and Taunton, Massachusetts; and Dover and Manchester, New Hampshire. A great cyclorama painting of a cotton field and levee with river boats became the new backdrop. The singing of tunes such as: "Alabama Coon," "Poor Monah and Swell Coon," "These Bones Shall Rise Again," and "Honey, OH," continued to receive requests for encores.

They returned to New York and played Madison Square Garden from September 16th to September 26th. They spent a week at the Clermont Avenue Rink in Brooklyn, a large hall famous for boxing matches. Their next stop was the Grand Opera

**CONVENTION HALL,
Corner 5th and L Sts. N. W.
3 — LAST NIGHTS — 3
Last Matinee Saturday of
NATE SALSBURY'S
Majestic
Black America**

Reserve seats at Droop & Sons', 925 Pa. ave., 50c.,
75c., \$1. Admission, 25c. Best reserved seats,
matinee, 50c.; all others, 25c.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE
BROAD AND MONTGOMERY AVENUE

EVERY EVENING AT 8
MATINEES
WEDNESDAYS & SATURDAY

HERE THEY COME AGAIN!
TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO PHILADELPHIA OF NATE SALSBURY'S

EVERY EVENING AT 8
MATINEES
WEDNESDAYS & SATURDAY

BLACK AMERICA
300—BLACK MEN AND WOMEN—300

THE MONSTER CHORUS OF JUBILEE SINGERS! CAMP MEETING FESTIVITIES! SEVENTY BUCK AND WING DANCERS!
Scenes of Animated Rural Simplicity in Days! The Innocent Diversion of Slavery Days! Superb Choral Effects! Real Representations at a Race Famed for Spontaneous Exuberance of Human Nature!

A Detachment of 9th United States (Colored) Cavalry | At Every Performance a MONSTER CAKE WALK
Decidedly the Talk of the Town.
BLACK AMERICA travels in its own Special Train, and carries more people than any indoor entertainment in America!

Grand Opera House, To-Morrow Night, November 4

Seats may be secured at BLASIUS', 1109 Chestnut Street, and at Our Office of Grand Opera House.

This large ad appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on November 3, 1895. Fred Pfening III collection.

House in Philadelphia for a scheduled twelve day run starting October 7th. They arrived in Washington D.C., home to many of the performers, on Saturday October 19th. The company opened a week's engagement on Monday, October 21st at the Convention Hall. Salsbury noted: "The singing is much better in theaters and convention halls than with nothing but the sky for a sounding board."²⁸ Salsbury cancelled a planned week of travel to Richmond and Norfolk, Virginia, after receiving reports that there might be trouble if he brought his show south. They extended their engagement at Convention Hall in Washington D.C. for another week. The show returned to The Grand Opera House in Philadelphia on Monday, November 4th.

The final news accounts record that cast members were unaware of what was to come. Charles Jeremiah Crawford, one of the best of the cake walkers, told his friends on November 21st that on May 1, 1896 he would be going to London with the Black America troupe. Miss Bessie Lee added Jesse Williams's song "Little Sleepy Coon" to her repertoire. Thanksgiving dinner onboard the train, standing at 13th Street and Lehigh Avenue in Philadelphia, required over 500 pounds of turkey.

Then without any notice Nate

Salsbury closed the show on November 30, 1895, and it never appeared again. The cast which may have read notices that the show



Cordelia McClain, Prima Donna and dancer. Author's collection.

would re-open in New York in December discovered they were dismissed and the equipment returned to Ambrose Park for storage and disposal.

A new production titled "Darkest America" with a company of fifty black performers and an all black band and including many of the cast members of Black America formed in 1896. This production continued until 1899.

Nate Salsbury and Colonel Cody were still the lessees and managers of Ambrose Park in 1897. The Young People's Baptist Union engaged the park for its convention and requested alternations of the facility. The

convention was held in Chattanooga and Salsbury and Cody demanded \$2,500 or threatened to bring suit against the members of the committee who signed the contract.²⁹ At the close of the 1897 season, Salsbury contracted with John Ambrose to build a cycle track to be known as the "National Cycledrome" at Ambrose Park.³⁰

One wonders if the influence of this show on a ten year old New York City boy named Jerome Kern would guide his work on *Show Boat* years later.

Cast Members: Victoria Allen, Chorus; Susie B. Anderson, Singer; Jeb Andrews, Banjo player, Re-united with daughter Harriet; Williams Banks, Singer; John Bradus, Fired shots at members of troupe; William Cornell, Standard Quartette; Charles Jeremiah Crawford, Cake Walk dancer; Blanch Davis, Chorus; Dorn Dean, Dancer & Singer; William Delanhey, Delicately touched by bullet; Ed Demoss, Standard Quartette; Pablo Diaz, Contortionist; Nettie Eccles, Chorus, stabbed; Gertie Evans, Chorus; William Farrell and Mrs. Farrell, Singers & Dancer & Comedian; Madam Flowers, Prima Donna; Mamie Furbe, Chorus; Julia Greene, Chorus; Charles Harrod, Cast member charged with stabbing; Maggie Jackson, Chorus; John Jenkins, Cast; Julius Johnson, Singer; William Jones, Cast; Col. Daniel A. Keyes, Ticket booth-died in barber chair; Miss Bessie Lee, Soprano; Lewis, Cotton Gin Operator; Edward Lucket, Sustained slight scalp wound; James Lucket, Delicately touched by bullet; Cordelia McClain, Prima Donna & Dancer; William "Billy" McClain, Singer and actor; Ida Prime, Chorus; R. C. Scott, Standard Quartette; Harry Singleton, Singer, promoter, called father of colored concerts; Martha Smith, Chorus; David Hardy, Snowball, Boxer; Joe Somerville, Singer; Robin Stand-back, Cotton Gin Operator; Charles W. Walker, Dancer and Singer; H.C. Williams, Standard Quartette; George Wilson, Singer; Mrs. George Wilson, Singer and piano soloist; and Twenty-three ex-members of Ninth

(colored) Cavalry.

NOTES

1. Dahomey was a country in Africa, now called the Republic of Benin. The Kingdom of Dahomey was a powerful West African state founded in the seventeenth century.

2. South Brooklyn Ferry Company principals were: John W. Ambrose, president; W.B. Cutting, vice president; F.H. Bergen, secretary; and Joseph Richardson, treasurer. The property was perfectly level, unoccupied and on the market for two or three years. See endnote #1. GPS coordinates: 40-39'24.23"N and 74-00'35.39W elevation 7 ft.

3. "Midway Shows Coming Here," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 12, 1893, p. 1.

4. "Buffalo Bill's Grand Stand," *The Brooklyn Eagle* December 20, 1893, p. 5.

5. Harry Tarleton's Black America account in Salsbury's Reminiscences. This report is based on a story from Lew Parker, the general manager.

6. "Black America on View," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, May 24, 1895, p. 7.

7. Nate Turner (1800-1831), a Negro slave and lay preacher, was the leader of the only effective, sustained revolt in the annals of American Slavery. The insurrection took place in August 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia.

8. "Darkies in the Profesh," *Boston Globe*, July 28, 1895, p. 21.

9. Roger Allan Hall, "Black America: Nate Salsbury's Afro-American Exhibition," *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (March 1977), p. 51.

10. "Slave Life in the South," *New York Times*, June 9, 1895, p 13.

11. "Fun for the Darkies," *New York Times*, June 2, 1895, p. 16.

12. "Black America" is Open," *The Brooklyn Eagle*. May 26, 1895, p. 4.

13. Hall, "Black America," *op. cit.*, p. 52.

14. "The Coming Show," *The Sunday Spy*, Worcester, Massachusetts, September 8, 1895, p. 3.

15. "Black America on View," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, May 24, 1895, p. 7.

16. "Black America" on Parade," *New York Times*, June 12, 1895, p. 9.

17. "A 'Black America' Parade," *New York Times*, June 14, 1895, p. 8.

18. "Black America," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, June 11, 1895, p. 6.

19. "Row at Black America," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, June 14, 1895, p. 7.

20. "The Dance Interrupted," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, April 30, 1895, p. 1.

21. "Types of African Beauty," *The Washington Post*, from *The Brooklyn Times*, July 14, 1895, p. 21.

22. Quadroon-A person of one-quarter Negro ancestry.

23. "Lighting Strikes 'Black America,'" *New York Times*, June 28, 1895, p. 9.

24. "Ebony Actors to be Taken Abroad," *Sandusky Register*, Ohio, July 3, 1895, p. 2.

25. "Separated on Slave Block," *Boston Globe*, August 18, 1895, p. 30.

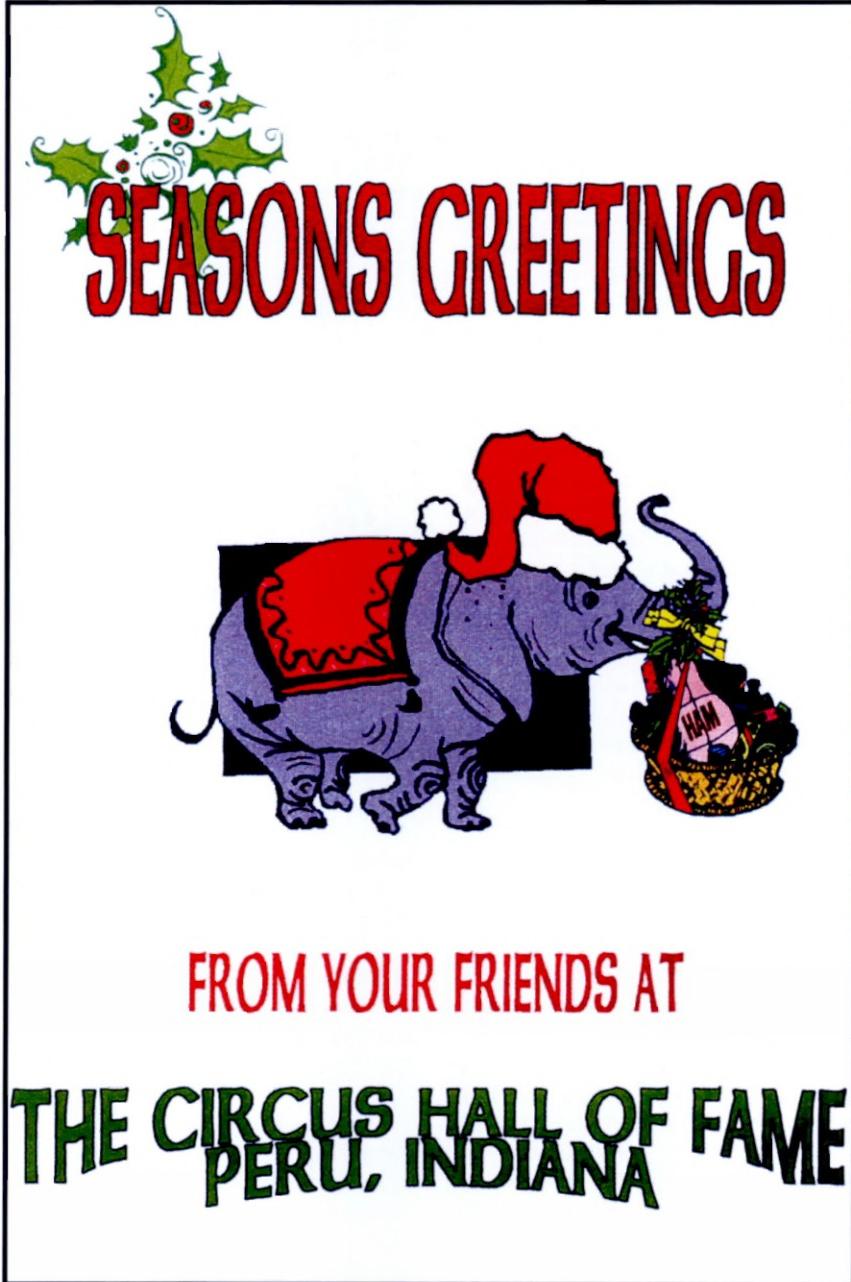
26. "'Black America' Fight," *Boston Globe*, August 21, 1895, p. 12.

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29. "To Sue Baptist Young People," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, April 16, 1897, p. 14.

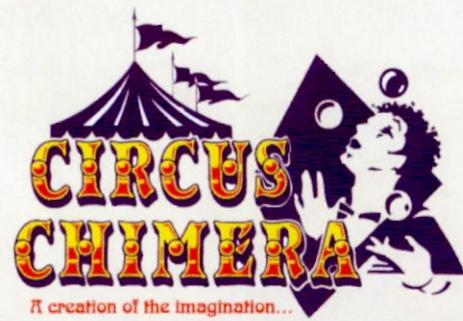
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Seasons
Greetings

Ringling-Barnum's 1942 Menagerie Fire

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

When the 1942 season opened the Ringling-Barnum Circus moved on 90 cars. The menagerie contained 45 elephants, a large number of lead stock and twenty-four cages. The animals were housed in a 320 by 120 foot, six pole tent.

Due to wartime rail restrictions the show played more multiple day stands. Philadelphia was shown June 1-13. It was there that the circus faced the first real problem of the season. Forty-one musicians went on strike, wanting more money. The show said nothing doing and dropped the band and went to canned music.

Ringling-Barnum played Cleveland, August 3-6. It was there that catastrophe struck the big show. On the morning of August 4th the menagerie caught fire. Over 40 animals died as the menagerie tent went up in flames.

The August 4 *Cleveland News* reported: "Thirty-six or more wild and trained animals today were

burned to death or destroyed by police as fire swept though the menagerie of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at East 9th Street and Lakeside Avenue.

"Loss was estimated at \$200,000 by John Ringling North, circus owner, and at \$75,000 by Fire Chief James E. Granger.

"Two elephants, five deer, four lions, two tigers, a puma, and possibly smaller animals were killed before the eyes of 5,000 horrified spectators.

"Circus roustabouts, girl trapezists, candy butchers and elephant boys either formed bucket brigades or led agonized animals to safety.

"The fire was one of the worst in circus history, but fortunately, the big top itself some distance from the

This view shows the Cleveland lot after the fire. The burned menagerie area is at the end of the midway. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

menagerie escaped the flames.

"All the slaughter of animals by fire, and the coupe de grace from police sub-machine guns, rifles and revolvers, there was only one person injured.

"He was James Santangelo, 22, a circus usher whose right hand was torn by an elephant hook as a man-haul led out an elephant past him.

"Mayor Frank Lausche rushed from the City Hall to the circus grounds when the alarm sounded and helped firemen rig hose as police kept back gathering crowds.

"Cause of the fire was not officially determined.

"The elephant—Rosy—hobbled from her tent, her pelt burned entirely off. She suffered in silence. She was chained to a motor truck. Police fired six rifle shots into her head. She fell. Then the police emptied their sub-machine gun into her head again.

"Eight camels tethered inside the tent were burned to death and the



other camels were led from the blazing tent with their hair burned almost entirely from their backs.

"There were scenes of unbelievable animal agony. Lions still alive, paced helplessly in their flaming cages, their hair burned off. A brace of Bengal tigers were similarly trapped.

"A number of zebras created a near-panic among the spectators when they broke from their halters and galloped across to East 9th Street and down on to the railroad tracks before they were rounded up.

Henry North, circus executive, said the fire started in the west end of the menagerie tent. After a hole was burned in the tent wall, a lively west wind made the flames race across the entire tent.

"It was the big show's first serious fire since 1916 when 64 horses were lost in five minutes in Huntsville, Alabama.

In Columbus, Roland Butler, advance agent for the circus, said a new menagerie tent was being rushed from headquarters in Sarasota, Florida.

A half dozen caterpillar tractors were used to remove tent poles, charred cages and other debris. Large quantities of hay, meat and other animal food were destroyed."

The *Chicago Herald American* of August 4 reported in part: "A swiftly-spreading fire raised Ringling Bros. menagerie tent today torturing scores of animals. The entire tent went up in flames on Cleveland's lakefront. Some of the animals—

Circus workers fighting the flames.



The giraffes lay where they died.

among them the gorillas, Gargantua and Toto—were moved to safety.

"Cries and bellows echoed in the smoke as the flame, fed by straw and sawdust swept Ringling Brothers' famous collection of animals gath-

One of the four elephants lost in the fire.



ered from all over the earth—many of them irreplaceable now, because of war conditions.

"Many beasts were roasted alive in their cages. Others, horribly burned, were put out of pain by keepers, policemen and coast guardsmen with sub-machine guns and rifles.

"John Ringling North said the monetary loss could not be computed until an inventory was completed, but it unquestionably ran into tens of thousands dollars.

"The fire started atop one of the animal cages, eyewitnesses said while a crowd of 5,000 looked on, elephants broke loose from their man-

cles.

"The afternoon's performance was cancelled, but John Ringling North announced the circus would reopen for tonight's performance."

The August 5 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported in part: "Eight hours after fire consumed the entire menagerie tent of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, burned to death or suffocated 27 wild animals and necessitated the mercy shooting of nine others, the show went on again last night under a big top of canvas and bigger shadow of one of the worst tragedies to strike a circus in modern times.

"Doubtlessly swelled by persons turned away yesterday afternoon, when the matinee was cancelled, the crowd totaled 11,000, or 3,000 more

than the attendance Monday night.

"In the eight hours after flames rolled across the top of the huge animal tent at noon yesterday, like an orange-hued tidal wave, the circus staged an unparalleled demonstration of its famed discipline, organization and steadiness in a crisis, as 900 roustabouts and their bosses removed the carcasses of dead animals, scraped and painted animal wagons whose occupants lived through the inferno, carted away mounds of rubble and erected a temporary corral.

"Under a wide canopy of fire, the veteran elephant boss Walter McClain, built on elephantine lines himself, took his crew into the tent amid failing brands of canvas and released 46 of the big bulls. Three they could not reach. Another,

Ringling Rosy, was loosened from the deep-driven iron stake in which she was tethered, but she refused to leave.

"McClain was the only human injured in the fire. His right cheek was burned from hairline to his shirt collar. Before being treated with tannic acid and ointment, McClain directed his men in staking Rosy to the ground with double chains around each massive foot."

A more definitive report on the fire appeared in the August 13 *Billboard*. Under the headline "Cleveland Menagerie Fire Loss Estimated by North at \$200,000; Police Quiz Alleged Incendiary" The article read in part: "Cleveland, August 6. More than 40 animals, some trained, are dead as a result of fire which consumed the menagerie top of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus on the lakefront lot here last Tuesday about two hours before the afternoon performance was scheduled. Loss, not covered by insurance, was estimated by John Ringling North at \$200,000.

"That the blaze was of incendiary origin was claimed by police, who arrested a young colored former employee and who has, they say, confessed that he and a companion set the fire to menagerie hay 'to get even with the circus for firing us.'

"Press reports praised the efficiency of circus employees for getting many of the animals out of the burning tent. Police cordons held back crowds and police with guns aided circus attaches in destroying some animals too badly burned to recover. Grief of performers and workingmen over the fatal plight of the animals

Two menagerie cages following the fire.



Dead camels following the fire.

was commented upon generally by press and radio.

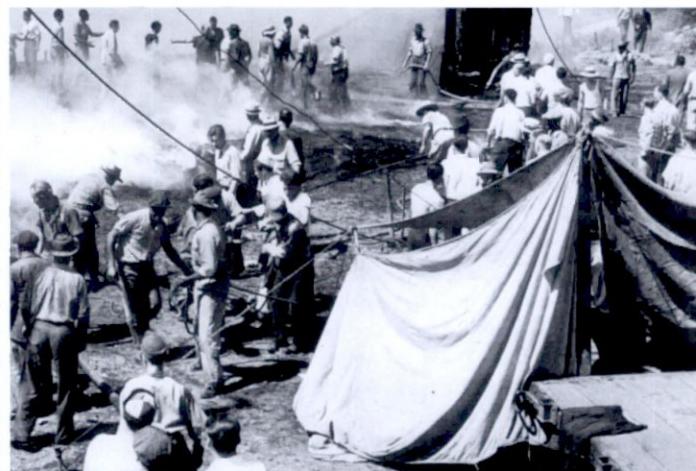
"Menagerie was opened to the public for the Tuesday night performance of the local engagement, Monday through Thursday, with side walls only. A reserve top was ordered shipped from winter quarters in Sarasota, Florida for the opening in Akron yesterday. Twenty-three damaged cage wagons

were restored for use within a few hours. One giraffe wagon was demolished. Full performances were given Tuesday night and on Wednesday and Thursday to tremendous crowds. Officials said they expected to present a menagerie back to normal at Monday's stand in Youngstown, Ohio.

"The fire was fanned by a brisk breeze. General Manager Art Concello esti-

mated shortly after the blaze was extinguished that the total loss of animals might be about 50.

"President North said that intangible losses in terms of animals of rare origin, irreplaceable because of wartime shipping restrictions, might



Circus workers fighting the flames.

bring the total loss to a higher figure than the estimated \$200,000.

"Cause of the fire, considered one of the worst in circus history, naturally created much speculation. As so often happens when onlookers spread sensational rumors unsupported by evidence. It was reported that two small boys had set fire to the menagerie top. One of the workingmen who was first on the scene thought that the blaze originated in the roof of the tent, possibly caused by a spark from a passing locomotive, a railroad line being within a few hundred yards of the grounds. While many remarked on how fortu-



nate it was that the fire had not occurred during the performance, it was pointed out by the circus management that at such a time there would have been several hundred employees on the job and flames could have been quickly extinguished.

"The circus became the first business to benefit from new priority powers of the War Production Board, J. B. French, regional priority manager, giving it a rating which assured quick repairs of electrical generating equipment destroyed by the fire, and city power being made available during repairs.

"Quick action saved the gorillas, Gargantua and Toto, their air-conditioned cages having been adjacent to the menagerie (in their poleless tent) at the time of the fire. Cutting ropes holding the canvas above the cages, which had been doused with water from a fire hose, allowed the canvas to form a protection and enabled attendants to move the cages away from the flames, the occupants evidently being entirely unaware of the situation.

"Some animal, with singed hides, that were so frightened as to cause fears for their recovery, have been pronounced okay and are expected to recover, being kept under observation. Dr. J. Y. Henderson, circus veterinarian, and assistants worked throughout the night and early morning hours in an effort to save the lives of injured animals and to give relief through application of special medicament known as 'follie,' a 15-gallon drum of which was flown

The side walled menagerie used after the fire.

by air express from New York City.

This soothing oil was swabbed over the bodies of the animals with long-handled brushes. Superintendent (of elephants) McClain, whose face was scorched, reported that he used this preparation on himself with excellent results.

"Henderson, who had joined the show in 1941, was really tested in Cleveland. He took full control of treating the burned animals and saved many of them. No prior circus veterinarian had faced such a task.

"Lemandria Ford, 16-year-old Negro, was returned here from Pittsburgh, where District Attorney Russell H. Adama quoted Ford as having said he and a companion tossed lighted cigarettes into the menagerie hay because they had been discharged by the circus management. Ford was said by the prosecutor to have remarked, 'I felt pretty sorry when I saw all those dead animals around.' A search was begun for the companion Ford said to have declared was with him.

"It was said Ford and another worker were hired on July 26 while the show was in Pittsburgh and was later discharged for being absent from duty Tuesday morning before the fire, were paid off that afternoon a few hours after the fire and disappeared after receiving their pay, Ford was arrested by railroad detectives at Duquesne, near Pittsburgh, while riding a freight train and was held on a charge of illegal riding. A railroad

detective said Ford had menagerie meal tickets in his possession.

"Police including Chief John Brice, of the circus, did not credit the story told by Ford after questioning him as to details. They believe it possible that he may have sought to be the 'center of a sensation.' More information is being sought about him from his family in Pittsburgh. Youth is reported to have suffered a fractured skull in an auto accident last winter.

The same *Billboard* also listed the animal death toll: "Four elephants, Ringling Rose, Rosy (Wallace), Toby and Kass. Thirteen camels, nine zebra, two giraffes, four lions, two tigers, one llama, one puma, two brindled gnus, two Indian deer and two burros."

Gordon Potter inventoried the menagerie when the show played South Bend, Indiana on September 4. He noted that there were 24 cages on display, including three giraffe wagons and 41 elephants, 1 llama, 2 Ponjurs and two giraffes. The two Gorilla cages No. 98 and 175 were displayed in their tent between the menagerie and the big top.

Cage No. 79 was empty and parked outside the animal tent. Cage No. 93, with sea lions, was in the back yard. Alfred Court's performing cats were housed in three French cages, two Ringling-Barnum cages and four former Hagenbeck-Wallace cages.

At least two flat cars with burned cages No. 71, 73, 81, and 97 were sent back to Sarasota, possibly on system flats.

After the fire the show abandoned the poleless gorilla tent and the gorillas were placed in the menagerie.

The 1942 fire saw the end of Ringling-Barnum displaying a large number of lead stock. It was also the last year the big show used a large six pole menagerie tent.

Despite newspaper reports that the show had no insurance, official circus files listed the following claims.

- 4 Elephants at \$3,500, \$14,000.
- 13 Camels at \$300, \$3,900.
- 9 Zebras at \$250, \$2,250.
- 2 Giraffes at \$4,000, \$8,000.
- 2 Gnus at \$300, \$600.



Another view of the tentless menagerie.

5 Lions at \$500, \$2,500.
2 Tigers at \$500, \$1,000.
2 Ceylon donkeys, \$100, \$200.
1 Puma, \$300.
2 White Faced deer at \$300, \$600.
1 Axis deer, \$300.
1 Ostrich, \$100.
1 Chimpanzee, \$300.
Total \$30,250.
Cage No. 76, \$80.
Cage No. 79, \$115.
Cage No. 88, \$105.
Cage No. 97, \$850.
Cage No. 73, \$1,200.
Cage No. 71, \$1,200.

Cage No. 86, \$542.
Cage No. 192, \$252.
Cage No. 95, \$230.
Cage No. 75, \$477.
Cage No. 84, \$310.
Total \$5,361.

It can be presumed that a claim was also filed for the menagerie canvas and electrical equipment lost in the fire.

The biggest loss was the lead stock, all of the camels and zebras being killed.

When the show played Columbus on August 12 the author saw cage No. 79 parked near the runs. It remained there until the circus loaded the flat cars that night.

The fire decimated the menagerie. No menagerie tent was used in 1943. However, a three pole tent in the back yard, not open to the public, housed the elephants and cages used in the spec.

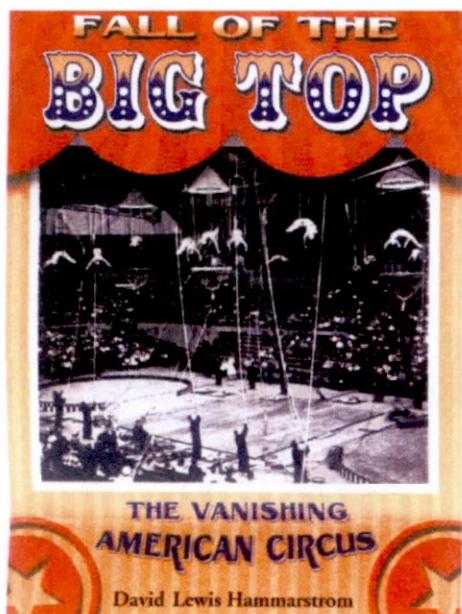
The train was cut to 75 cars. It carried only 26 elephants. Four camels were purchased. Seven cages in the back yard were carried for use in the spec.

Ironically the big show had suffered a fire in Cleveland in 1914 when 43 stock cars were burned to the ground.

Other fires have occurred in circus history. The Bridgeport Barnum & London winter quarters burned in 1887, killing a number of animals.

Ringling Bros. lost the side show tent in Kansas City in 1901. The Barnum & Bailey big top was lost in a fire in Schenectady, New York in 1910. The Ringling Bros. big top was burned down in Sterling, Illinois in 1912. The Ringling Bros. baggage stock tent was lost in a fire in 1916 in Huntsville, Alabama. Eighty horses were lost. And worst of all, was the 1944 Hartford fire.

Richard Reynolds contributed information for this article.

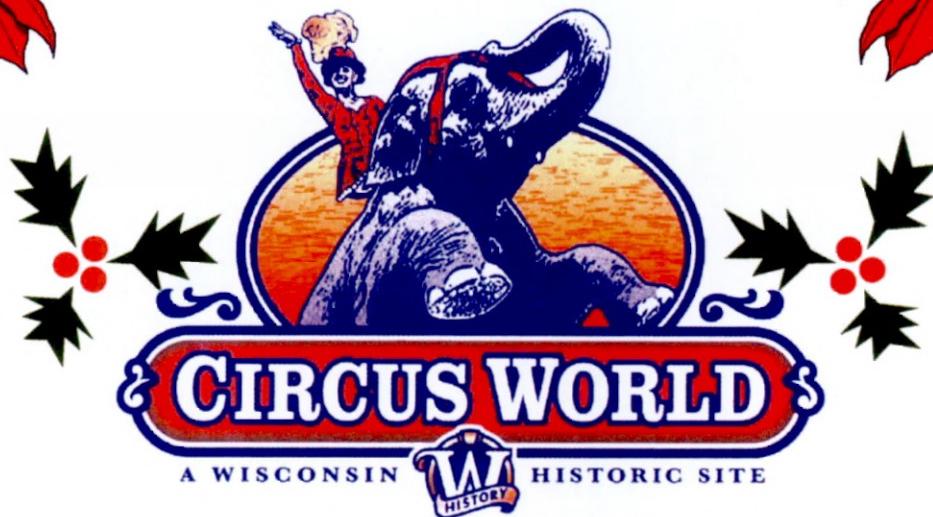


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Circusing In Europe

By Al Stencell

My fascination with European shows has been going on for close to four decades. I'd cross an ocean any day to see Euro shows. I only visit a couple of circuses here yearly and then visiting old friends or people who have worked for me are the main reason for going. In Europe I want to see the trucks and the wagons, particularly those old circus wagons. I want to see Hanomag tractors working on the lot. I want to see the zoos and enjoy the performances I especially enjoy the live music and the clowning. Things all started when the love of my life moved to England. She was working in London, England in 1971 and I was doing the billing for Bill English's Hanneford Circus here.

That fall I booked three weeks of dates around the Ottawa Valley in Ontario, Canada for my Christmas

The Berlin Wall's demise in 1980's brought to an end the great circuses of the DDR. Overnight--three huge government funded circuses and a handful of private circuses had no protective barrier from outside competition. The area was flooded with small West German circuses of poor quality and the East German circus business was finished. The wagons were bought up by many western circuses. Former East German ticket wagon (drop frames--big heavy wheels built to take the poorer roads in the East) on Busch-Roland 1990's.



Gasser's Circus Stey in a misty last October day on their closing date in northern Switzerland above Stein on Rhine. Just a short jump over to the show's winter quarters at Connyland.

stage circus. I had three phone crews working on them. The first date, Brockville, Ontario for the Shrine, paid for the whole tour. Armed with a wad of cash and a beautiful pearl set in a ring circled with diamonds, I sailed out of New York City harbor a few days before New Year's en route to Southampton, England to ask Shirley to marry me. A few days after our engagement, we were in Croydon Hall watching a traditional English

Christmas circus and soon cutting up jackpots with the riding Mohawks—the McMannus family. A few weeks later, members of the Knie family took Shirley and me into their training barn, brought us coffee and sat us down on horse saddle benches to watch rehearsals.

In Munich we attempted to get tickets to the evening's performance

This attractive tented entrance on Knie had been around since the late 1980's. There is also a smaller version for tight lots. This photo was taken in October 2006 in Montigny, Switzerland, a two day stand.



at the Krone circus building, but were told it was sold out as it was clown Charlie Rival's last public appearance. I went to the back door of the Sembach home next door and knocked. I introduced myself as a budding Canadian showman to Carl Sembach. He assured Shirley and me that he would personally meet us in the lobby that evening and get us seats. He did, literally squashing people over and sitting us three rows from the ring.

Noted French circus fan Luc Cardin picked us up at our Paris hotel and sped us through Paris to the Cirque D'Hiver building. At intermission he took us back stage to meet the Bouglione family and animal trainer Gosta Kruse. Kruse took us back to show us the stables, the cat cages, a big glass cage with serpents in it and his elephant group.

Several Paris book stores had piles of the books. *Le Cirque D'Izis* by Jacques Prevert. The text was taken from various circus and fairground books and illustrated with terrific photos and included four original compositions by Marc Chagall. It was being remaindered for a few francs. People were going in and buying a half dozen copies at a time. Outside they pulled out pocket knives and proceeded to cut the Chagall pages out and toss the books in a nearby garbage bin! I

Three cuts of Krone flats unloading in Mainz in 1997—the last time the show moved between dates by rail. The train was over six hours late coming in. That may have been the last straw.



Circus Krone train moves in two sections. Here is the first section unloading in the mid 1980's. Note how the flat car sides fold down to bridge the space between the flat car and the "ramp" or permanent rail yard platform. The Hanomag tractor is the showman's work horse.

bought one and it remains my favorite show book of all time.

The famous Les Halles market in central Paris was almost gone except for a few remaining steel market structures that sat in the middle of market operations going around them in the square and side streets. You rarely walked a block anywhere in the city without coming face to face with an image of a menacing gorilla on one of Cirque Jean Richard posters. Text on the poster screamed: "Visitez Le Zoo-Les Halles." The show had rented one of the covered market structures and had hung the big top from the center roof trusses to divide the area in half. The painting and refurbishing of the equipment and trucks was going on in one half while the practice ring, steel arena, stables and the zoo were on the other side. Parked

in the street along the front of the building were the show's ticket wagon, offices, bar-concession semi and walk through entrance.

The zoo was open daily from 10:00 A.M. and stayed open to early evening with the big gorilla, a giraffe and cages of tigers, lions, small cats, bears, etc. Patrons sat in a section of the show's seating to watch rehearsals in a ring and the steel cage set before them. If they got tired of that, they could visit the zoo animals, walk through the stabled stock, or buy a beer or a coffee at the concession stand. I stayed all day and saw Gilbert Houke work tigers and Alexis Gruss Sr. train horses. One of the staff took me over to the other side to see the trucks.

In the short time frame of several months I'd seen a half dozen countries and a lot of European circuses. I



One of the old short wagons on Elfie Jacobi Althoff's Austrian National Circus in Gasse in 1993; the last year she owned the show. Note the small wheels.

was instantly hooked on them. It seemed everywhere you went, you bumped into a variety theatre, circus or fairground set-up. In Valencia, Spain we came across a big railroad carnival and in another part of the city we saw Conny Gasser's famed Florida Dauphin Show in a tent. In Vienna we saw the winter Stadhalle Circus that included several top Russian acts. During the big Russian mixed cage act a bear moved all the props and kept picking up the



The first section of Circus Knie being unloading around 6:30 A. M. in Sion in 2006. The pole and seat wagons are already on the lot. This cut has concession wagons, offices, zoo entrance, zoo cages.

trainer's whip and handing it back to him whenever he dropped it. A Russian wire act worked on a rigging that looked like a huge diaper pin. Travelling from Nice to Rome I saw a circus setup beside a station. Going back up there the next day, I got on the wrong train and ended up in another town. Inside the station were posters for Circus Moria and Ninando Orfei. I found a taxi and was soon walking around Italy's largest circus. I met members of the Orfei family. Later, I was delighted to spot them in various Fellini movies.

Back in Hanover, Germany I was up at five o'clock and waiting in the freight yards to see the big Busch-Berlin Roland-Bremmen Circus train roll into town. This was a large show with a lot of old wagons. The ani-

mals—elephants, a cage act, and the hippo were leased from Circus Knie. I met the tent boss. Iris DeWitt, whose family was in the flying act business. It was the first time I saw end scoops on show generators. They arrived here about ten years later. When we returned to England we were in time to see the Billy Smart Circus open in Birmingham. The tent was a big four poler with two rows of queen poles (quarter). It was a pole maze through which you caught fleeting glimpses of the performance. That season was their last under canvas.



Elephant tent on Circus Krone. The small trailer is the heating unit.

Despite the restraints of running our own circus and booking most of the dates myself, I tried to slip away to Europe for a few weeks whenever I could. I'd become an avid book collector. Paris, Amsterdam, and London were the best places for this.

The circuses I saw and the show folks I met were an inspiration to keep plodding away with our own show. After each Euro-trip I had renewed energy. I was completely hooked on old wooden circus wagons. Watching Knie come in on the train and



unload became a must see each visit.

I've seen them in the Opera House lot in Zurich, in the market square in Vevey and numerous other towns including Bellinzona, the last stand of the season where they had to clear half a foot of snow off the lot before setting up. Everything had to go back to winter quarters by train that year as snow had blocked the mountain passes.

It took me a few visits before I saw Circus Krone tear down and move by train. It is the biggest rail show I have seen outside of a carnival. I pulled over in a small dirt lay by in the early morning to get some sleep. I woke to see the giraffe wagon a few inches from my front bumper and the show train speeding past a few fields over. I raced into the town and the station to be there to see the first section roll in.

In the early 1990's I witnessed the transition of Krone from rail to over-the-road travel. This took three or

four seasons with many of the upgrades on wagons and trucks done in their own work shops on the road. Many of the longer new wagons were built in the winter quarters during the winter months. Gone are most of the short old wagons that had a lot of character. One had a builder's plate on it from 1923.

However, the new longer ones are built to appear to look like the old wooden sided wagons. Besides being longer, they have better steel frames and the latest brakes, lights, tires and under gear.

Krone remains the largest under-canopy circus anywhere with its 4500 seat big top. The front of the circus with its large two wagon facade entrance, ticket wagon and row of office wagons along with the zoo entrance and the zoo ticket wagon enhanced by an ornate wooden fence, is still an impressive sight. The show carries one of the biggest horse stables of any circus, although the zoo itself has been shrinking over the last few seasons. The giraffe died and only the hippo is left. The show still carries nine bulls.

Back home, few Americans care didley boo about European shows. A few European acts whose families came over for Ringling in the 1940s boasted of their old world heritage, but few wanted to go back to living in circus wagons or English style caravans. The only fans who knew much about these shows were those who had done U.S. military duty in Europe. Even now, not many fans or show people pay attention to the great shows there. It remains a mystery to me because the roots of circuses go back to England and the continent.

Some of the earliest show train movements took place in Germany. The curved circus wagon roof originated there to allow taller wagons to fit through tunnels. In France and other countries the traditional circus tent was not the four pole square tent now associated with most European circuses.

Many American shows have now adopted it, but the original style of tent preferred by many early European circuses were long ones with four poles straight in a line with three middle sections and two round ends, just like ours. After World War II Circus Pinder, Amar, Radio and others in France were still using the four pole top and their trucks were mostly American ex-army vehicles, making their appearance very similar to American truck shows of that era.

When I described the elaborate shows there, especially Roncalli or Circus Krone or Knie, to circus people here they always come back with the comment that European outfits can afford to be big and flashy with comfort-



Mother and daughter watch the monkeys in the zoo of Circus Royal, Thun, Switzerland, October 2006. Lots of animals are in the zoo including a baby hippo.



Swimming pool framed on wagon for James Clubb's polar bear act on Busch-Roland in early 1990's.

able seating and proper stables for the animals because they stay for long periods of time in one place. Certainly, in past decades some of

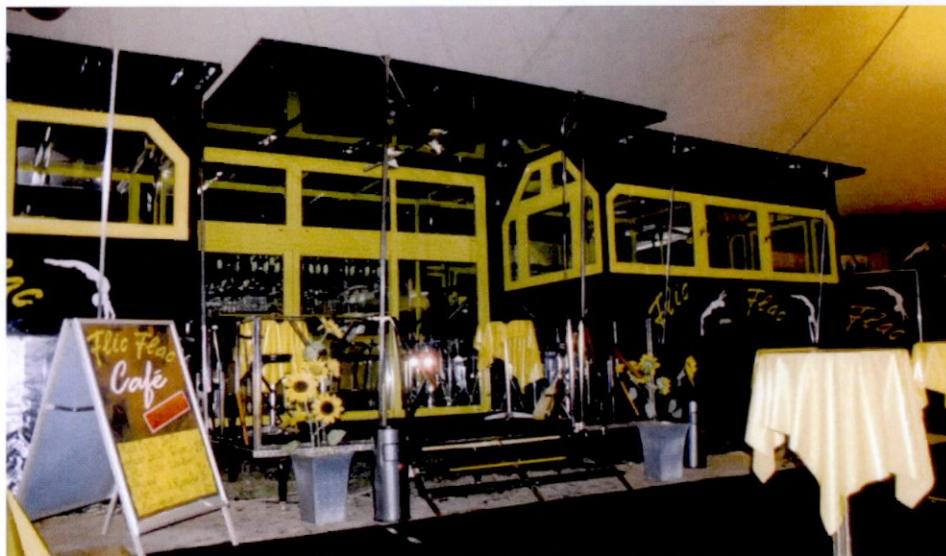
the larger shows stayed weeks in big cities. Circus Roncalli can often spend six weeks or longer in cities such as Munich and Vienna. However, the average European show only plays a few days in each town. Large French circuses such as Amar and Pinder have always played a lot of one day stands during their summer route as did many Dutch and Scandinavian circuses. Many still do. In the 1980's I came across Hans Malter's Dutch circus, a much larger show than Carson and Barnes, playing one day stands in Holland. Most of the medium size shows play two towns a week.

Krone usually plays one town a week with occasional ten day stands in larger population centers such as Hamburg. The last show on Sunday is usually at five o'clock, allowing for an early teardown. The living wagons have been moved out to the next town by mid-morning. The

The overture begins on Circus Barum in 2006. This year the show has dropped the 2000 seat top for a 1200 seater. The sparse audience tells you why.



whole of Monday is used for travel and set-up. Some years Circus Knie plays a small town that only warrants a one day stand. Most years, the show plays a mixture of extended week stands in Zurich and Geneve mixed in with a lot of three-day and two-day towns.



The bar with four pop outs on Circus Flic Flac--the best circus in the world for new circus acts and out of the world accomodations for the public. The show has portable washrooms where the men's section has vibrating toilets.

Since I had missed the rail shows here I tried to see as many Euro-rail circuses as possible. Over the years I have seen Krone, Busch-Roland, Sarassani, Barum, Inis Togni's Circo Americano, Orfei, Roncalli, Knie, and Elfie Althoff Jacobi's Austrian National Circus on rails. To my regret, I had put off seeing the latter until its last season. I was always wondering how she got mixed up with Rudi Jacobi. They seemed like an odd couple. I was delighted to see her show. Jackie Althoff was over there moving it and was doing a good job. Some of the wagons still had hard rubber tires. I can still hear them rattling down the cobblestone streets of Styre in the early morning hours en route to the station ramp. The next stand at Grasse was the last of the season and the last year she owned the show. That day an ambulance came on the lot and took her to the hospital. Louis Knie bought it. He rebuilt much of it, but

kept it on the train for another three seasons under the Austrian National Circus title. Today his son and former wife run a smaller version of the show on trucks.

Now only Knie, Roncalli and some of the Italian shows still move by rail. Knie is the most efficient and

tem flats. What European show folks call the "ramp" is not the runs placed at the ends of a flat car as we know it. They do not carry portable runs. Circus trains in Europe load and unload mostly in the freight areas of stations where they pull alongside a solid platform that is part of the freight shed or train yards. Most shows have a run car or first flat car which is left beside the ramp and new cuts shove up to it. European flats have small, solid sides--about 18 inches high that fold down on to the platform and bridge the gap between the flat car and the dock platform. Usually the sides on the run car and the next two flats are let down onto the ramp, giving enough space for loading or unloading. The ends of each flat car in the cut of flats are also folded down in a similar manner to fill in the space between flat cars eliminating the need for portable crossover plates like we use here.

When the tractor pulls a wagon or two wagons hooked together onto the flat it does so only a short way, allowing room to disconnect and drive off the flat. Another tractor with an extended pusher pole hooks on to the back of the wagon and pushes it down the flat. The wagon is steered by two men holding the pole. Each man wears a bag similar to what old time paper boys wore. This is a pad device that protects the poler's ribs and side. Knie helps the polers by painting a yellow stripe down the center of the flat cars similar to the yellow line on a highway. This helps keep the wagon in line as it goes down the string of flats. When the wagon is a few feet from the wagon in front of it, the polers unhook the wagon tongue and throw it under the wagon. The tractor pushes the wagon up close to the wagon in front of it. The wheels are then chocked. It is important to keep the wagon sides clear of the sides of the flat car--make sure nothing protrudes this distance because of the tunnels. If the train master feels the wagon is slightly off he uses a portable jack similar to a "farmer's helper" and jacks the wagon over in place.

the most interesting to see. Regardless of where you see the show, the train always pulls into the station show day at 6:00 A.M. It's off the train in a couple of hours and the big top and stables, etc. are all set up by noon on build up day. On moving nights the show train is usually loaded by 1:00 A.M. The horses, bulls, and exotics are no longer moved by rail, but go in trucks. However, it still takes two trains to move the show. What makes the Knie operation so efficient is the dedicated service they get from Swiss rail. Everywhere else the railroads would rather see show trains disappear. In most Euro countries freight is moved by road and water while railways move people. Fewer and fewer places have freight yards with platforms and ramps for the rail shows to use. In the mid nineties Inis Togni told me one ramp in Holland was thirty kilometers away from the show lot.

Both circus and fairground European showmen have been moving wagons and equipment by rail much longer than their American counterparts. However, they do it quite differently. Flat cars are very short, about the length of our old sys-

Once a wagon is in place the tractor backs the length of the cut and off and the procedure is repeated until the cut is loaded. It is very fast and efficient. A number of the show's trucks are used to move wagons singly or in pairs to and from the lot. On teardown night they rip through the cities streets at a fast clip with the wagons swaying from side to side behind them. When the stock and bulls were moved in rail box cars, the animals walked to and from the lot to the rail yards. At night, each animal had a reflector bracelet on its outside back leg. It was always an awesome sight to see these large gray shadows walking along the train cars in the rail yards on load out night and watch the grooms with flashlights load them up into the appropriate cars. Knie usually had the names of each elephant painted on the sides of its particular car. One night I watched as the train master had to call the yard engine back to split the cut so the bulls could go across to their cars! When circuses moved their animals by rail they got a lot of free publicity as they were walked from the rail yard to the lot.

In 1976 Andre Heller and Bernard Paul put out a circus titled Circus Roncalli, named after a pope. One of the first of many books on the show called it the "Weird Circus." It influenced the presentation of circuses around the world.

Heller left to do other artistic spectacles while Paul plodded along through up and down years producing a show that eventually everyone from Soleil to Ringling copied. It was soon impossible to travel around the circus world and not run into Paul's impact, both outside the show and in the ring. Besides restoring popularity to the German circus, he brought beauty and art back into the circus. His show is always a visual treat from the superbly restored wooden circus wagons dripping in gold leaf to the ornate fencing and light stands along the facade to the fancy entry tents with fresh-cut bouquets of flowers and elaborate restaurant facilities.

Long before Soleil was claiming to reinvent the circus, Bernard Paul had established the new wave circus, how it looked on the lot and in the magic circle. Circuses from England's Gerry Cottle to New York's Big Apple copied Paul's ideas. He restored clowning to a central role in the performance. His band was hot. He made it hip for teenagers and the early twenties crowd to go to the circus--again. From the time you get your six-color ticket from the show's ornate ticket wagon until you leave to the sound of the show's band organ umphahing and wheezing, you have been thoroughly enchanted and as well entertained as any theatrical on Broadway.

ring crew with performing skills was unique. His shows have always had a strong comic element to them and most feature a prominent comedian or circus clown. In recent years he has become a very good clown himself. Every circus in the world has benefited by this man's blending of animals, traditional acts, comedy and new artists into the most pleasing two hours you will spend in any theatre in the world.

As shows here fade and become mired in animal rights issues, DOT regulations, and labor shortages--European shows become stronger and continue to adapt to current social vibes. This is what has kept most operations relatively success-



The huge three ring circus of Circus Berolina--a former big East German Circus title now run by a small circus family. A giraffe, zebras, bear act, nine elephants plus a huge number of horses, llamas and camels makes the ground acts look almost like filler numbers on this show. Seen here fall of 2006 in Leipzig, Germany. Show moves on 20 trucks.

Paul maintains that your circus experience should start at the box office. He became the master at finding old acts and giving them new costumes, lighting, and choreography to make them ring sensations again. He became the master off taking the best from certain acts and putting their best routines in a shorter but stronger number. His idea of using a

ful. They have an owner's association. Perhaps their greatest strength is the hundreds of small family shows. Circus started to die in the 1980s here when we lost what few remaining small shows still toured. These were the circuses on which young performers could break in their acts and gain valuable touring experience. It is where the tent masters, electricians, and bill posters came from. In Europe these family shows continue to feed the larger shows with artists, particularly animal acts such as liberty horses and elephant numbers. In many cases these small family shows have grown to be the medium size shows of today.

Some of the larger traditional circuses--particularly Busch-Roland, Sarassani, and Barum have slipped

from their former high status. However, they have all managed to keep going. Sons and daughters of the old managements have stepped forward to continue to build the shows back up, and in the case of Sarassani changed it into a large magic show. In the last decade circuses such as Herman Renz and Daniel Renz's Original Renz have emerged as two of the finest circuses on tour anywhere today. Both feature fast-paced animal acts, good orchestras, exciting ground and aerial numbers and hilarious clowning.

In Europe you still see new ideas in circus and spectacle. For several decades a show called Flic Flac has lead the way. Not only does the show change physically but the program is always cutting edge. Flic Flac is the circus to see if you want to see the latest in seating or tent design. The show's \$200,000 toilet wagon is an eye opener. There are numerous horse operas including Norman



Trained giraffe on Circus Krone.

Latour's Cavalia from Quebec on tour in Europe along with Andre Heller's tented show "Africa, Africa." Mixed in with all this activity is the Soleil units, numerous tented Moscow Circus clones, and dozens and dozens of circus school operations or cabaret-style tent shows. Hidden gems like Belgium's Circus Ronaldo and Circus Wiener are there for your discovery. Switzerland still

has a good number of shows for such a small country and many of the smaller shows are truly unique. Monti, Circus Royal, and Nock offer first class programs. Daniel and Rose Gasser's small circus—a dinner theatre show formerly called Circus Lilliput—is another hidden treat as is Circus Harlekin.

So, get your passport, change your dollars into Euros and get over there. Winter or summer there is plenty to see.

Christmastime brings as many as 18 shows into Paris while Zurich will have two or three Christmas circuses. Holland is awash with indoor circuses in December. The New Year brings Monaco's famed Monte Carlo circus festival along with the Circus of Tomorrow at the Cirque d'Hiver building in Paris. Circus schools, art presentations, circus and fairground museums, and off beat variety cabarets are in abundance. Learn and enjoy.

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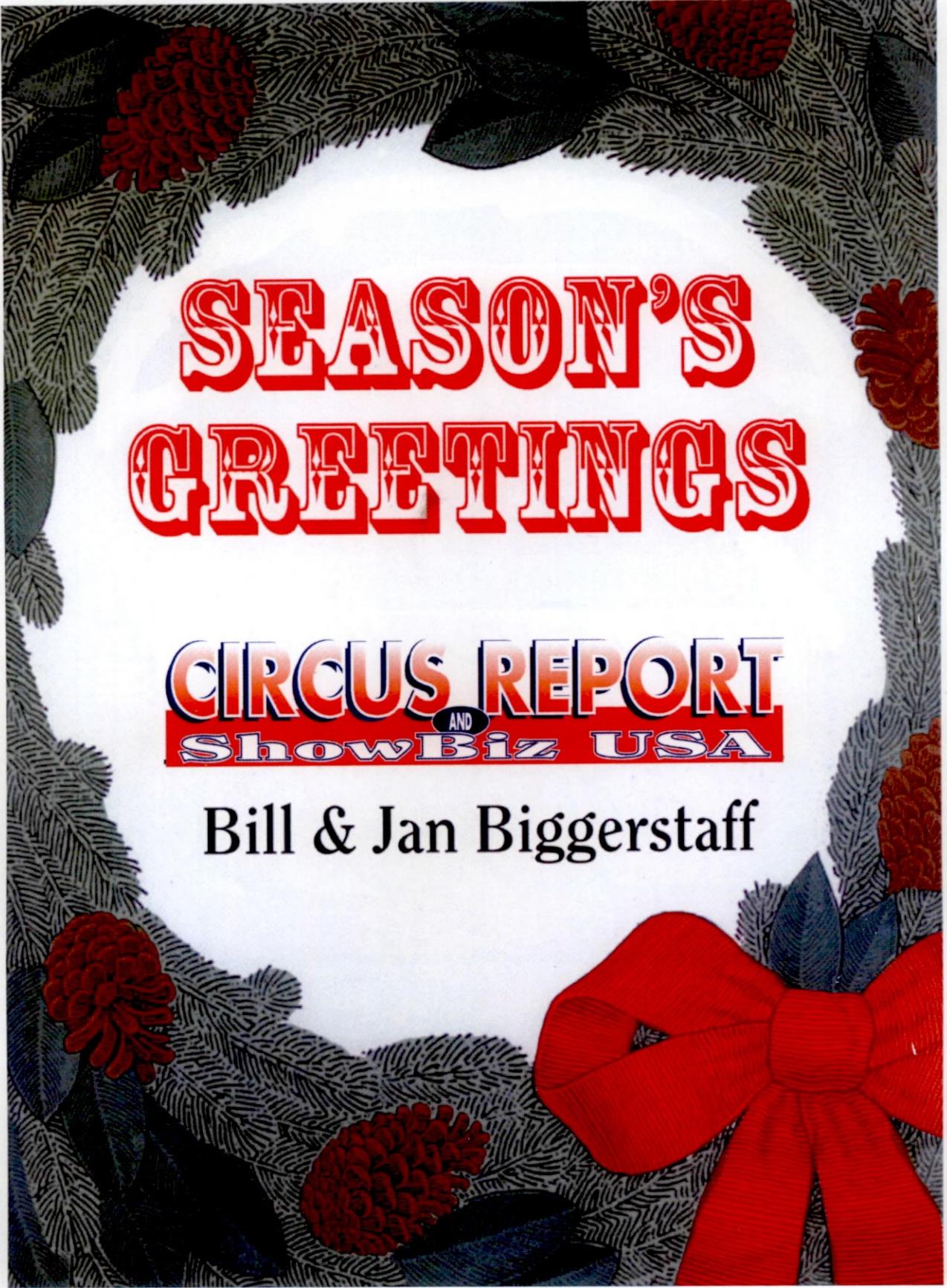
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CLIFF VARGAS: TAKE HIM OR LEAVE HIM--OR GET FIRED

By Lane Talburt

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"You weren't really with it on Circus Vargas until you got fired once or twice."

James "Dutch" Crawford still wears his invisible badge of honor as one of many performers who left unceremoniously and then returned to the fold under Cliff Vargas's ownership. Crawford and his Arabian steeds were center-ring performers on the circus in 1981-1982 and again in 1988-1989.

He recalls getting the boot three times. Each time Vargas invited him back, and each time Crawford demanded--and got--more money for returning to the fold. For the past four years, Crawford has been a truck driver, operating out of his home in Wilmington, Illinois.

Producing clown Johnny Peers, who was on the show from 1973-1976, got the boot twice. After his second dismissal, however, he left for good. Peers just concluded a season with his Mutville Comix on the Big Apple Circus.

Manuel "Junior" Ruffin lasted the entire 1975 season as boss canvasman, but "King Charles" Weathersby, who arrowed the show for a short while, fell into the category of those who simply walked away in disgust. Ruffin (featured in a series of three *Bandwagon* articles this year) is living in retirement in North Port, Florida.

"King Charles" Weathersby arrowed the show for most of the 1975 tour before walking away in disgust. He posted route arrows for Bob Childress's Lewis and Clark Circus during the 2007 season.

Bill Biggerstaff managed to weather six years of "Vargasms," emotional explosions by his boss, as the front-door manager before leaving

the show in 1980, taking the principal aerialist as his wife and the circus's advertising and promotional account as well. Biggerstaff owns Graphics 2000 and publishes *Circus Report* from Las Vegas, Nevada.

For almost two decades, Clifford E. Vargas was the uncrowned ruler of the West Coast circus scene. He set new standards for lavish spectacles and raised the salary bar for star performers and key members of his operations team.

Vargas, who died at age 64 of heart disease in September 1989 at his home in Hollywood Hills, was described in a two-paragraph *New York Times* obituary as the grandson of Portuguese circus owners.

He got his start in the circus business as a promoter. He eventually bought out Charlie Germaine's Miller Johnson Circus in 1972. A year later he changed the name to Circus Vargas, which he operated under canvas until his death 16 years later.

Without question, Vargas did everything on a super-large scale, from a 5,000-seat big top, to the lavish spectacles and production numbers staged inside it.

"I was starting from virtually nothing, but I knew what I wanted to do," Vargas told a *Time* magazine writer in 1976. Building the show, the writer continued, "seems to require

the logistical genius of a Hannibal, the showmanship of a Hurok and the business acumen of a Howard Hughes. A traveling circus has to put up with the whims of the weather, moody animals, occasionally avaricious police and fire departments and frequently finicky bureaucrats who require a sheaf of licenses, clearances and permits."



Bill Biggerstaff and a friend on Vargas. Biggerstaff collection.

The *Time* article also quoted Fred D. Pfening Jr., *Bandwagon* editor, as saying the Vargas show was a traditional circus of outstanding quality, and "the unique thing about it is its perpetual migration across the country."

To the *Time* magazine writer observing the set-up of the circus, Vargas appeared as "a small, bearded figure, zip(ping) frantically through the melee, hauling on ropes, testing wires and worrying about the wind."

And well he should have been fret-

ting. His big tops suffered blow downs on a number of occasions, including 1974 in New Orleans and 1975 in Mt. Clemons, Michigan, in 1975. His "Vargasms" at the slightest breeze drove the tent crew and performers to distraction.

His associates used terms like "innovative" or "charismatic" to describe the bachelor showman. But they related numerous incidents--some funny and some disturbing--to illustrate his erratic personality.

"He was the most unique person I think I ever met," says Biggerstaff.

"He was a promotional genius. You would do anything for him one minute, and you'd want to kill him the next."

Here are some of their jackpots on the colorful showman.

Biggerstaff: What? Vargas Apologize?

Biggerstaff can probably top all his co-workers for the story on Vargas's largest mass firing of people. He remembers when Vargas, the consummate practitioner of "high seating" under the big top, was encouraging audience members to squeeze together tighter so he could cram more people into the tent.

"And they were reluctant to move, so he said, 'Alright, you're all fired. Get out! The whole section, you're fired! Get your money back and leave.'

"[Diamond] Jim Parker was with the clowns, and he yelled, 'Go get security. Go get security.'

"And Vargas said to Parker, 'Get back here, you idiot. I'm not going to [fire the audience].'" But Parker believed him." At this point Biggerstaff was guffawing.

Biggerstaff experienced Vargas's occasional outbursts just as often as any other staffer. He particularly relished recalling a reserve-seat problem confronting him at the opening matinee during a Circus Vargas mall date in suburban Chicago. A new marketing team created the conflict by circulating a set of box-seat tickets that duplicated the set being sold by merchants at the mall.

Confronted by a dozen angry circus-goers who had the same tickets for front-row seats, Biggerstaff, in his role as front-door boss, offered to

refund the customers' money. Though disgusted, they accepted the refund.

"When I explained that to Vargas, he said, 'That was not a decision for you to make. That's not your decision.'

"So I said, 'I'm sorry. It won't happen again.'

"That night, being opening night, the whole front end has a group that has duplicate tickets—I think it was 178 people. And I said, 'Would you follow me, please?'



Johnny Peers, a Vargas clown.
Pfenning Archives.

"I paraded up to the ticket wagon with all these people, and I said, 'Mr. Vargas, I have the whole front side with duplicate tickets. And I don't know what to do because that is not a decision for me to make.'

"And he flipped out. He said, 'Give them their money back.'

"Then Vargas said, 'I must apologize. I should have kept my mouth shut. From now on, I will not interfere. You do what you want to do.'

"That," Biggerstaff chuckled, "was one of my crowning moments."

Although he was more or less a full-time employee from 1974 to 1980, Biggerstaff was initially contracted to design the show's marketing materials and advertising.

Having graduated from the Art Center in Los Angeles in 1964, he did free-lance work for Ted DeWayne, Sid Kelner's James Bros. Circus, Big John Strong's show, and Pat Graham's Graham Bros. Circus, among others. He also designed Ringling Bros. advertising for West Coast appearances.

In 1972, Vargas, who had handled promotions for other circuses, was starting his own show. He bought out Charlie Germaine, who had lined up widely-scattered dates for police groups under the Miller Johnson title.

Biggerstaff told this writer that Germaine named the show after two of his former "close associates." On the other hand, Johnny Peers said he had heard that Vargas got the name from a dry-cleaning establishment which he happened to pass by.

"The first time I saw Miller Johnson was at Long Beach, California," Biggerstaff said. "And it equaled the Ringling show. It had everything imaginable."

"Germaine would get [major acts for the first engagement at a given city], then he would sign a five- or six-year contract, and then bring back a third or less of the show later."

"Vargas was a first-rate promoter. He was working for Germaine, and he was so successful that he started his own [marketing] company."

Angry about the bait-and-switch booking tactics and concerned for his own credibility among other circus clients, Vargas gave Germaine an ultimatum: either sell the show to Vargas, or the promoter would leave. As Biggerstaff recalls that Germaine predicted: "Vargas doesn't know anything about the circus. I'll have this show back in two or three years."

In essence, Vargas purchased the Miller Johnson dates, a minuscule amount of rigging, the tents were rented, and a few trucks. Peers

remembers the trucks being repainted with the Circus Vargas title after he joined the show in 1973.

"And Vargas put everything into it," Biggerstaff said. "Vargas sold his house in San Francisco to get all this together."

"He called me for breakfast one morning in 1973, and he said, 'I've spent all my money putting this together. I want to put out a quality program, but I don't have the money to do it. If you will do it, we'll split the profits.' And I said, 'Fine, I'll do it.' And that's how I got started with him."

As Biggerstaff was taking photos for the initial program, he pointed out operational deficiencies to Vargas. "He didn't have a front end. He didn't have a marquee. The police sponsors handled the front end. After the third act, they were raising the side of the tent and letting people go in free. I told Vargas, 'You need a good front end.' And Vargas said, 'I'll do it. You've got to come in and set all of this up for me.'

Biggerstaff demurred, citing the press of running his own graphics business. "And so the show opened [in 1974], and we were visiting in East Los Angeles. Vargas had the ticket sales booths--the carnival knock-down, square booths that he had set up. And I said, 'Look at that, Vargas.' The girl sitting inside the booth had \$10,000 setting on the counter, where someone could reach around and grab that money and run. 'And what are you going to do? Are you going after the thief, or are you going to stay here with the rest of the money and the tickets?'

"And that really got him. I said, 'You need a ticket office.' And he said, 'You've got to come on [the circus].'"

Biggerstaff agreed, and Vargas provided the funding to build a semi-trailer to be divided into two parts, half as Vargas's living quarters and the rest for the office. Later, Vargas urged elephant trainer Wally Ross to teach him how to drive a rig so he could get his commercial driver's license. He began making the jumps pulling the office wagon, demonstrating to other drivers that if he could arrive on time at the new lots, "you'd better make it on time," as

Biggerstaff remembers.

Vargas also was an early advocate of the shopping-mall promotion. But, as in the case of so many of his innovations, Vargas was slow to accommodate changes to his operating procedures.

To meet the previously contracted police dates also required the Vargas show to criss-cross the nation six times in Biggerstaff's first year on the circus in 1974. But the owner wanted to cling to sponsored engagements as his preferred marketing tactic.

Biggerstaff recalls how Vargas was convinced to start utilizing shopping malls. When the circus returned to the Los Angeles area from an East Coast run, the show had a week off for travel and then faced another lay-over before the next scheduled date.



King Charles Weathersby. Fred Hoffman photo.

Vargas had dinner with Sandy Dobritch, ringmaster at the time, and movie actor Parley Baer, who was on the show with his equally famed wife, equestrian Ernestine Clarke.

"And they said to Vargas, 'Why don't you do a cold date? You're off a week, and you're paying the people. What can you lose?'"

Initially hesitant to accept their advice, Vargas lined up a lot at nearby Devonshire Downs, rented a tent,

bought advertising, and conducted a multi-day run.

"And that made him. We did turn-away business. Parley Baer had the 'in' with the movie people, so he put out tickets to them, and we had a ton of movie people for the opening night," Biggerstaff said.

"And it was a good house, but it was almost a give-away. So, Vargas was thinking, 'Aw, that wasn't so great.' But [the circus] had a parade the next morning at a mall a mile or so away. And when they came back, you couldn't get near the tent. It was packed with people.

"They had three shows on Saturday, and three on Sunday. And police came out and made people leave the area. It was mind-boggling. And Vargas said, 'Hey, we're going to have to do something.' And then he realized, 'I don't have to give this big percentage to the police for being the sponsor.'"

That was the genesis of Vargas's legendary tie-ins with shopping malls, where merchants gave away tickets for opening night and sold tickets for subsequent performances. "Because we weren't a one-day show, the word of mouth was just spectacular."

Biggerstaff said Vargas paid some performers three times the going rate "until he discovered he could get by cheaper. But he paid top money. And he put all of his money into the show. He did spectacular specs and he really supervised the show, made sure it was top-notch. And he built a reputation fast, because people knew. And, boy, they packed the place."

The flashy owner eschewed rental tents and trucks, and used cash-flow—and shrewd bargaining—to purchase a new tent, and to persuade a Bay-area dealer to lease him a fleet of new cabs and semis with virtually no money down.

By taking advantage of the mild winter weather in Southern California, Vargas was able to beat other competitors who normally laid off in January and February. This gave him a good pad to start the new season.

Vargas still resisted implementing the suggestions of his savvy advisors. "But he learned the hard way in a number of instances," Biggerstaff said. "When we first started selling the program, I said, 'Do you want a coloring book, too?' He said, 'No, that cuts into the programs.' And I said, 'No, it doesn't. They're separate deals. So do you want to make that [extra] half buck?' Vargas said, 'Well, alright.' So we made a coloring book. It cost nine cents to produce; we sold it for a dollar. The first year we sold 134,000. He sees right away there's money in this, so he added posters of individual acts, postcards, everything imaginable. And we made big, big money."

Full houses created seating problems, and Vargas's bombastic high-seating techniques went only so far in handling the overflow. But these were the kinds of problems that brought opportunities. Once again, Biggerstaff stepped up to the plate.

"I suggested, 'Vargas, why don't you create a box and call it the president's box and put it front center. And if you have a guest that wants a good seat, it's there; if there's no guest, then sell it.'"

With Vargas's consent, "we set it up. And on the opening night in the Hollywood Bowl parking lot, a movie producer comes up and says, 'I want the best seats in the house. Money is no object.' And I said, 'Mr. Vargas is not here right now. But he has his own personal box that's not being used tonight. And he said you can have it.' The producer said, 'How much are the tickets?' I said, '\$25.' And at that time \$4 was the regular price [for general admission]. 'Twenty-five dollars,' the producer

said, 'I'll take them all.'

"And the next day we made box seats across the whole front and back. When we went from there to the Hispanic area in East Los Angeles, I thought, 'These people are not going to pay that kind of money for box seats.' But they were the first



Bill Biggerstaff and another Vargas friend. Biggerstaff collection.

ones to sell. They sold out."

Vargas, whom Biggerstaff credits as the originator of the "free kids ticket" concept while Vargas was promoting Sid Kelner's James Bros. Circus in the 1960s, was a stickler when it came to any attempt by townies to abuse the system.

During 1978, while the circus was playing the New York metro area, he ordered distribution of a circular informing customers that if any child appeared to be 12 years or

The Vargas side show in the 1970s.
Pfening Archives.



older, the circus would charge the children's rate upon receipt of a birth certificate or some other form of identification.

Despite some occasional heated exchanges at the ticket wagon, the concept worked fairly well until the show set up on Long Island. That's

when, according to Biggerstaff, the feisty showman slammed the gates in the face of a woman, reportedly the wife of a state senator. The woman said she was merely intending to accompany her son inside on a child's free ticket, but then proceeded to seat herself without paying the accompanying adult fare.

This confrontation brought the "heat," the cops arresting Vargas and hauling him off to a nearby precinct station. He later decided to skip the scheduled hearing before the judge, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. By that time the show was long gone. When the circus returned to the same stand the next season, the cops were waiting for him. Biggerstaff said he persuaded Vargas not to evade arrest, as Vargas had intended, by slipping out a side window of his office. The judge fined him \$250, a relatively small slap on the wrist.

Vargas was often his own worst enemy when it came to shooting off his mouth, Biggerstaff said. He pointed to an incident in Canada. Vargas, following procedure, served as ringmaster on opening night. Since McDonald's, the hamburger chain, was a major advertising sponsor for that run, Ronald McDonald

the clown rode an elephant in the opening spec.

"And Vargas announces, 'Now coming down the front hippodrome track is that perennial favorite, Roddy McDowell.' And the engagement director, who was standing beside him, said, 'Mr.

Vargas, it's 'Ronald McDonald.' And within the media's hearing range, Vargas said, 'Ronald McDonald, Roddy McDowell, what's the difference?'

"And McDonald's cancelled us for the rest of the run."

Only once does Biggerstaff remember Vargas being speechless in the ring. On another opening night--in San Diego, as Vargas was introducing dignitaries, an elected official dropped dead in his box seat. "Well, Vargas came unglued. He could not even speak. Fortunately, Mike Gorman, the regular ringmaster, had not left, so he made the opening."

At the end of the 1980 season, Biggerstaff returned to his full-time pursuit of producing promotional materials for other circuses. Of course, he took along his wife Jan, who had been a featured aerialist on the show. He also took the Vargas promotional account with him. As luck would have it, a printing plant became available for purchase soon afterward, and Biggerstaff became its owner. Since then, he has produced posters, billboards, programs and other paraphernalia for at least 70 different circuses.

Looking back on his years with the eccentric showman, Biggerstaff emphasized that Cliff Vargas truly raised the bar for tented circuses. "He played some big dates, and if you were a show that played that area, you'd better have a good show after he played there, or you were in trouble. So he revitalized the business."

But Vargas's erratic behavior probably shortened his life. Open-heart surgery sidelined him for a spell during the 1978 season. But he continued to enjoy life to its fullest.

Biggerstaff gave this example: "We were in San Francisco [to celebrate Vargas's birthday]. We went to one of the posh nightclubs [where] they had an assortment of antique tables. Vargas had a couple too many to drink, and he got up on one of those tables and started to dance. Well, [the restaurant management] invited us out and asked us to never return

again. And this was a big group of people that were doing big business with them."

Biggerstaff said Vargas's last words were reported to be "Don't let them forget my name."

Ruffin: What's in the boxes?

Manuel "Junior" Ruffin, a former cage boy for Clyde Beatty, who was hired in 1975 to be the Circus Vargas canvas boss, was instrumental in dramatically reducing the set-up and tear-down time for the show. In his own words, Ruffin recalls a few



Jan and Bill Biggerstaff, right, on the Vargas front door in the 1970s. Biggerstaff collection.

encounters with the savvy yet naive businessman:

"Vargas had a vision, and he worked hard at it. But he was kind of hard-headed. If you didn't know him, he was sort of hard to get along with. But he put a lot of trust in people. A lot of people worked him over.

"[In Tacoma, Washington], Vargas came up to me, and he had two boxes. And he said, 'Junior, would you do me a favor? Would you throw these boxes in back of the sleeper [of Ruffin's cab]. That way nobody will get a hold of them. And keep your truck locked for me.'

"I kept the boxes all the way from Tacoma until we got to Denver--that was about a month and a half later. And one night I lay down in the big double bunk on my tractor, and I bumped my head [on the boxes]. And I thought, 'I wonder what's in there?' Guess what was there?

"Eighty-thousand dollars, cash money, and it was in thousand-dollar

bands. I got so nervous I couldn't sleep that night.

"The next morning I walked up to the office wagon, and they [Vargas and some of his associates] said, 'Come on in, Junior.'

And Vargas said, 'Junior, is something wrong?'

I said, 'Cliff, do you remember a few months ago you gave me these two boxes?'

"What boxes?" He really didn't know. He had forgotten all about it.

And he really needed the money, because he was going to go borrow some [from his investors]."

Ruffin recalls "Gone with the wind"

"I remember we were putting up the big top at Cinderella Mall in Denver. And, oh my God, it was dusty. The wind was blowing, and Vargas ran in there, and the center pole was jumping. That's dangerous when you've got that. And the tent was rolling, and we're trying to get the sidewalls up, and the side poles were jumping.

"And I yelled, 'Get out of here, Vargas. You're going to get yourself killed.' I remember he went to run out of there. We had part of the side walls up, and one of the ropes came around and hit him right on the top of his head. It jerked the wig off his head, because, you know, he was bald. And it [Vargas's toupee] went on top of the tent. And he was trying to cover his head."

Ruffin left Circus Vargas at the end of the 1975 season to return to performing. He preferred working in a steel arena with big cats over the screams of Cliff Vargas at all hours of the night when the slightest breeze threatened to blow down the big top.

Peers: Promoting the Great Elephant Escape

Johnny Peers remembers Vargas giving him opportunities to promote himself, a skill he continues using to book his comedy routines on circuses, fairs and cruise ships.

A graduate of the second class of Ringling Bros. Clown College in 1969, Peers traveled with the Red Unit's clown alley for three years

before being hired as Vargas's producing clown in 1973.

Simply billed as "The Circus Vargas Clowns," the act consisted of Peers, Manuel Marcus "Zapata" Baragon and a member of an Arabic tumbling troupe named Habebe. On Vargas, Peers incorporated his first trained dog, which he adopted a shelter in upstate New York, into his comedic routines. He and his mutts would become a center-ring feature of the Ringling Blue unit in the early to mid-1990s.

"Vargas was very—as everybody knows—very eccentric," Peers recently reminisced on the Big Apple Circus lot in New Haven. "But on the other hand, he knew how to draw people to the show under any circumstances. It could be bad weather; it could be poor attendance—he knew how to get people to the show.

"For example, if there weren't many people coming to the show and we were still going to be there for a few days, he would have an elephant escape. And then, of course, the news would cover it: 'Circus Vargas. One of their elephants escaped at the mall.'

"Everybody watching would say, 'At the mall. The elephants. Hey, let's go.' And that night the tent would be full." Peers noted that trainer Wally Ross would drive a semi containing one of the bulls to the "escape" point, and then would be close at hand to reload the bull after the media had covered the not-so-impromptu event.

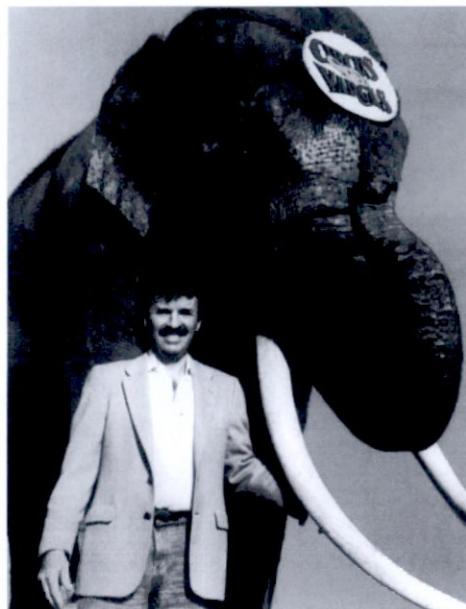
Peers Gets Fired (Twice)

"Here we were [in Southern California], waiting behind the performers' curtain, for the opening of the show. And Vargas comes up to me," at this point Peers is punching his fingers into the air and frowning, "and yells at me: 'You cannot tell people what to do here. You're not the boss; I'm the boss. You're fired.'

"And I'm going 'What did I do? I didn't say anything to anybody.' And come to find out, it was somebody else. But because I wasn't the guy, he looked bad in front of everybody, and he didn't want to say he was sorry. So he fired me."

Biggerstaff remembers the incident. Vargas grabbed the clown's costume, and Peers retaliated with a

punch to Vargas's nose. Peers recounted the confrontation by claiming that Vargas had picked up a wooden stake and was approaching him. "So I hit him," Peers said. "It was self defense."



Cliff Vargas and his elephant Col. Joe Pfening Archives.

"I was gone a couple of weeks," Peers mused. In the meantime, Judy Baker, wife of equestrian Billy Baker, "squared it for me: 'Look, Vargas,' she said, 'it wasn't Johnny; he's a good guy.'"

The wrongly accused clown was not aware that Vargas had recanted until Peers phoned home. His father, Terry Peers, a veteran circus concessionaire, informed his son that Vargas wanted him back on the show.

Returning to the circus, Peers also brought along all the clown props, which he had built for the routines.

And the second time he got the boot? "Well, he fired my partner [Manuel "Zapata" Beregon] for missing a radio interview at 6 o'clock in the morning," Peers chuckled. "I found that to be very upsetting; that wasn't right. So I said, 'Hey, it's time to go.'" And he left the circus in 1977.

Three decades later, Peers still retains vivid memories of both firings. He also remembers attending a meeting of all performers that Vargas called at which the owner encour-

aged an open and frank exchange of opinions. After the meeting, Peers mused, "Vargas canned three acts," apparently because they had been a little too outspoken to suit him.

But Peers, now in his 37th year as a comedic performer, credited Vargas for teaching him how to promote himself—an essential ingredient for an independent act. "We [clowns] all had to do the show, and then we had to do promotion on top of it. What we learned was to keep creating and coming up with new acts."

Weathersby: What Arrows?

King Charles Weathersby, conversing with the writer by phone as the veteran was laboring on Bob Childress's Lewis & Clark Circus in Virginia in the summer of 2007, said he arrowed the sizeable Vargas fleet during most of the 1975 season.

He almost got the opportunity to double as big top band leader. As Circus Vargas was making its initial California dates in San Leandro in 1975, the unionized circus band picketed the lot, forcing the show to play records behind performers' routines.

Weathersby, a former side show band leader and the first African-American to direct a big-top band, had just joined Vargas after closing the previous season as the Hoxie Bros. Circus band leader and arrow man.

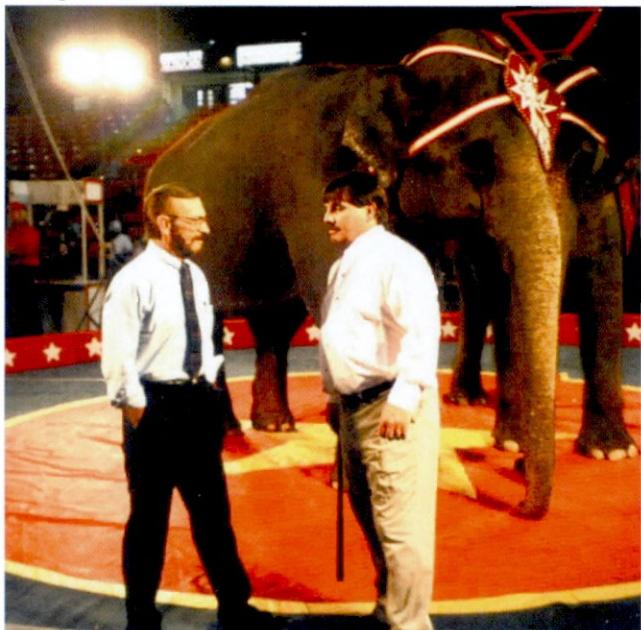
Vargas approached Weathersby to determine whether he could assemble a band to substitute during the walkout. "I was ready. I had the musicians in line." They included several of his sons from the Hoxie show.

Unfortunately for Weathersby, the labor dispute was soon settled, and the regular band struck up the music. "I really think my band would have done a better job," he lamented.

Earlier, Weathersby had successfully arrowed the show from its initial date in Miami Beach and continued to post the markers on long jumps to dates at Pensacola, Birmingham and El Paso. King Charles would help lay out each new

lot, assisting boss canvasman Junior Ruffin, who drove the big-top pole wagon.

His good luck in arrowing the circus ran out at Industrial City, just south of San Diego. While arrowing the show out of an asphalt lot, Weathersby placed arrows indicating the first major turn on a garbage dumpster at the lot exit.



Dutch Crawford, left, and Joe Frisco on Sterling & Reid Bros. in 2000. Photo by author.

During the night, a garbage truck emptied the load and set the dumpster down, almost at a right angle to its previous resting place. When the Vargas fleet pulled out the next morning, chaos resulted. Drivers scattered in all directions, requiring several hours to restore order.

"Yes, those were my arrows," Weathersby admitted, laughing.

Weathersby didn't last the season with Vargas. He quit following a blow down at Mt. Clemons, Michigan, in July 1975. "I just got miffed at Vargas. I said, 'That's it; I quit.'"

But Weathersby, like others, praised Vargas as "a clever showman. He was good. He knew how to handle the business, and he knew how to handle people."

Well, some of the time, any way.

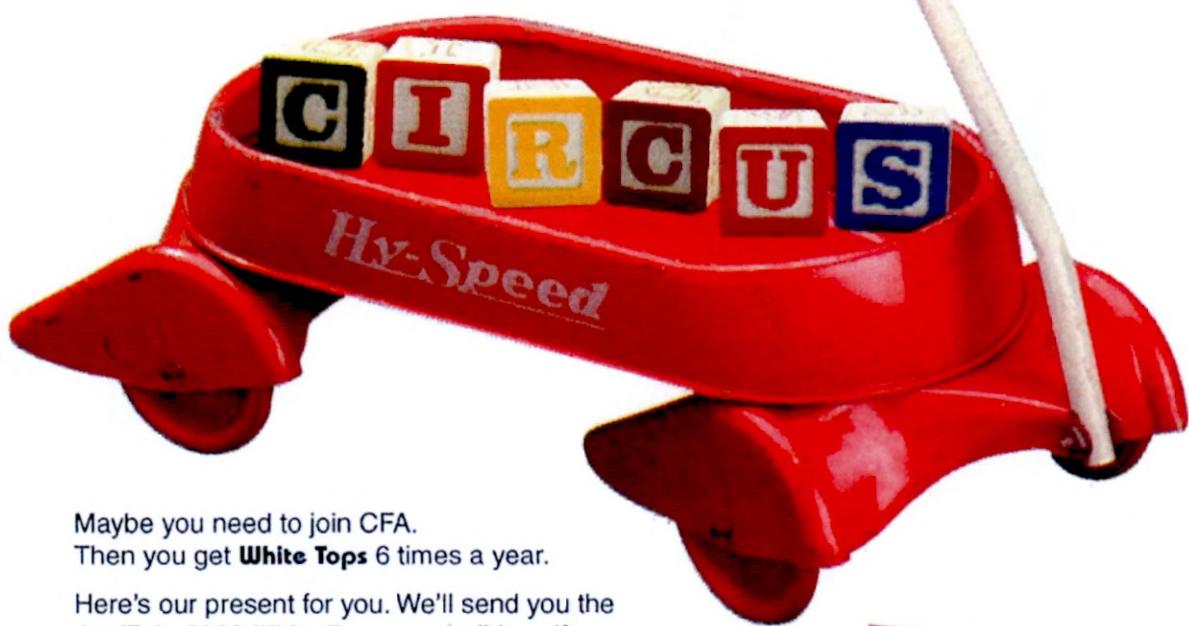
Crawford: Vargas's Blue-Streak Special

Vargas could vent profanity with the best of them, Dutch Crawford recalls. At the end of one performance, the owner called an impromptu meeting of all employees. As they sat in one section of the big top, Crawford clearly remembers, Vargas let loose a string of expletives. About that time two Catholic sisters traveling with the show silently entered the tent. When he became aware that the nuns were standing behind him, Vargas quickly pivoted to face them and, according to Crawford, said, "I'm sorry, Sisters."

Vargas then turned again to his employee audience and resumed his profane diatribe.



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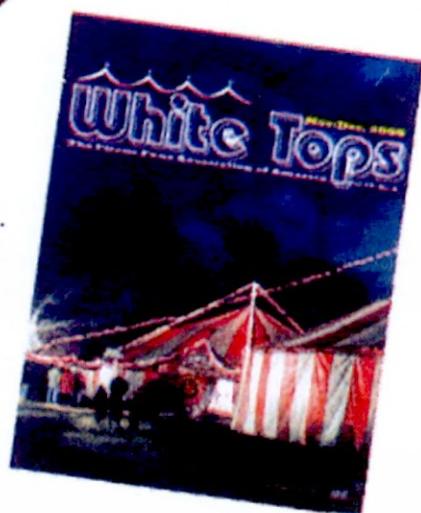
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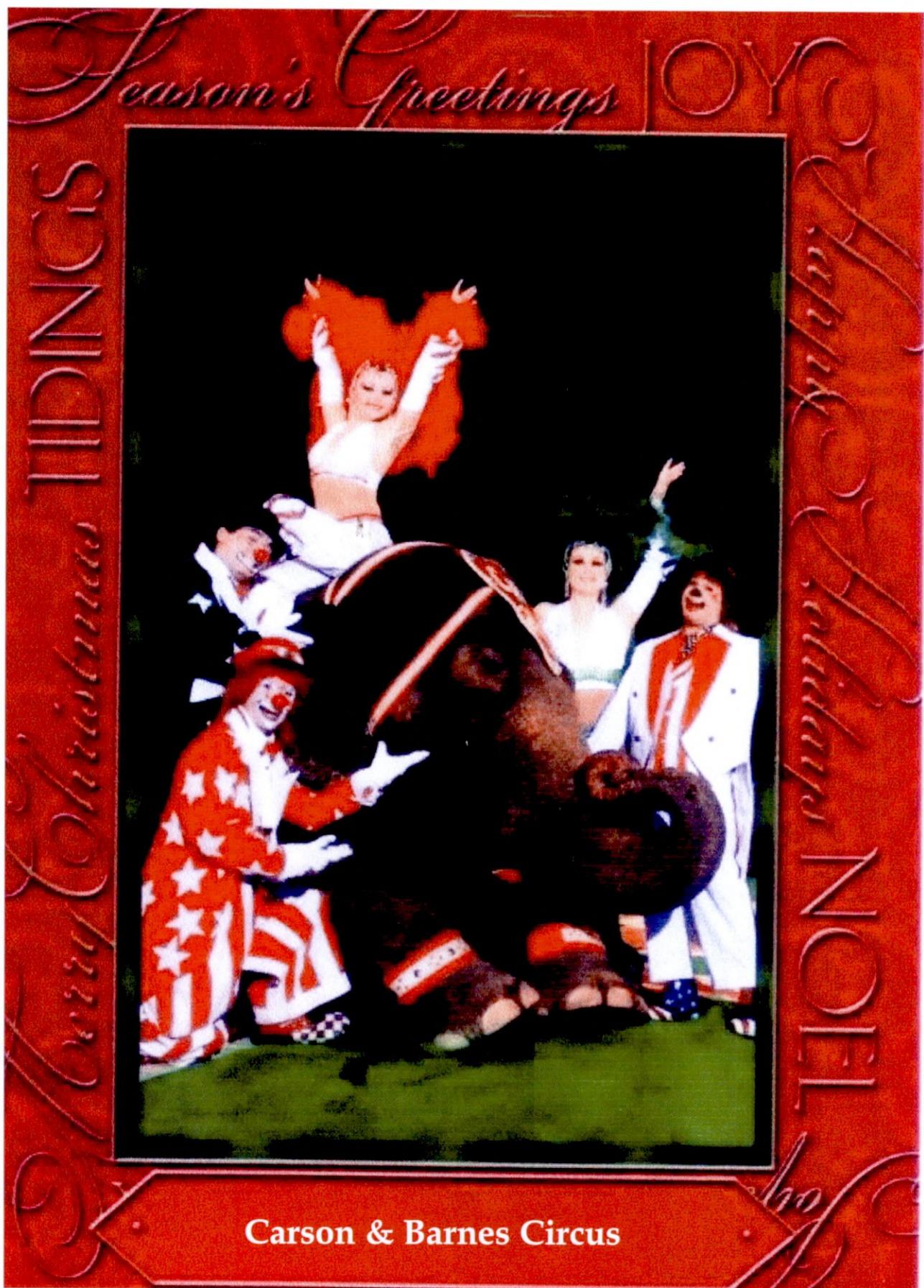
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Carson & Barnes Circus

CHS MEETS IN LAS VEGAS

By Herbert B. Ueckert

Almost sixty members of the Circus Historical Society and guests met September 30—October 3, 2007 at Sam's Town on the Boulder Highway in Las Vegas, Nevada for the annual convention. Presiding was President Robert Sabia who did an excellent job and was assisted by his wife Susan. Other C.H.S. members presided at individual daily sessions. Things at this jam-packed meeting got underway on Sunday afternoon with registration and a C.H.S. sponsored social hour which gave attendees an opportunity to get acquainted or re-acquainted.

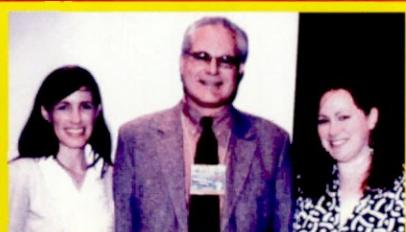
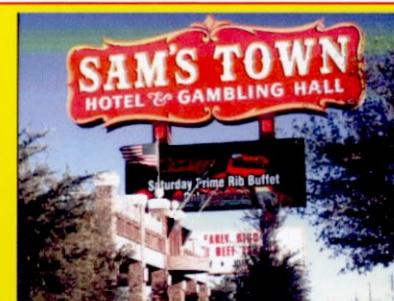
On Monday morning, after a brief report on C.H.S. business matters and the Board of Trustees meeting, the opening presentation "Ringling Revisited on a Wafer" taken from his six-hour program "Life's a Circus" was made by Robert Sabia who traced the influence and growth of circus throughout world history to that of the American circus with its menageries, its impact on communities, and its evolution into the Golden Age of Circus. By using film, mostly of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Sabia showed scenes of the winter quarters in the 1950s shot by Jim Hoy, Bill Day and Bill Judd. Another segment covered billing with extensive train shots from the 1940s and 1950s with particular emphasis on the unloading of the show. The film also depicted the cookhouse and big top setup, spreading of the canvas, the side show and challenges to the circus in the form of mud, sandy lots, and rain plus the advent of the use of Caterpillar power.

Following a break Michael Haynes, Curator of the Witte Museum in San Antonio, Texas spoke on Harry Hertzberg and the Hertzberg Circus Collection now at the Witte Museum. She also related aspects of early day tented Mexican

circuses in South Texas known as "Las Carpas" and their aerialists, trapeze and high wire artists, clowning, vaudeville type entertainment, dancing, and dogs and ponies.

After a huge lunch, everyone gathered to hear Matt Wittmann, a Fulbright Scholar and Ph. D. candidate at the University of Michigan, discuss "Empire of Fun: American Circuses and the Pacific Circuit of the 19th Century" in which he covered the dynamics of American popular culture—for example Tom Thumb, minstrels, and magicians. He gave a general survey of American circuses during the entrepreneurial era (1850-1870), the tran-

sitory years (1870s), and the emergence of the Pacific circuit (1880-1900). He covered the activities of Joseph Andrew Rowe and the clown W. H. Foley and his travels from San Francisco to Hawaii, Tahiti, Australia, and New Zealand. Foley was in the theater and variety halls in Melbourne in 1854 and New Zealand in 1855; he fathered six children and toured extensively. The transitory years of the Pacific market in the 1870s saw the emergence of many circuses on tours of the Pacific by steamships, especially Cooper and Bailey, a large circus. He concluded with a discussion of the Pacific circuit.



Noel Daniel, Fred Dahlinger and Carolyn Bowers.



Rick Purdue and Giovanni Zoppe.

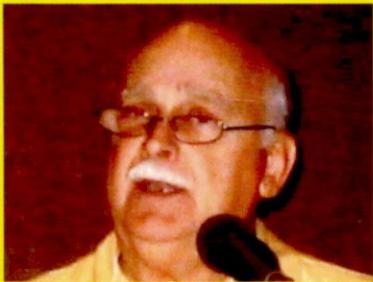


Al Stencell and Joe Parker.

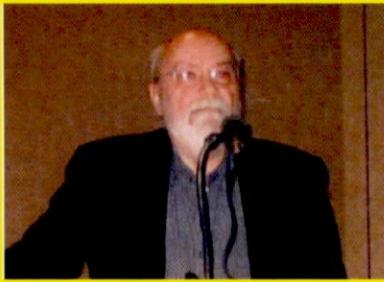
Kristin Spangenberg, Ray Gronso and auctioneer Al Stencell.



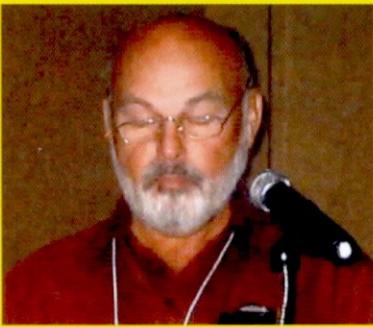
The following photos are by Ray Gronso.



Ernest Albrecht



Tom Dunwoody



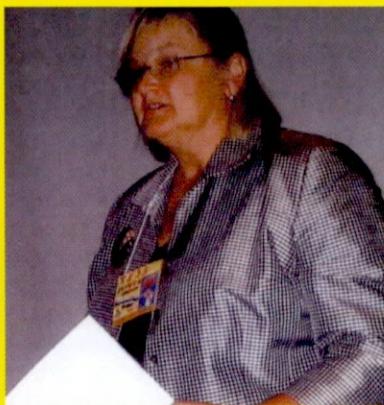
Richard Georgian



Michael Hayes



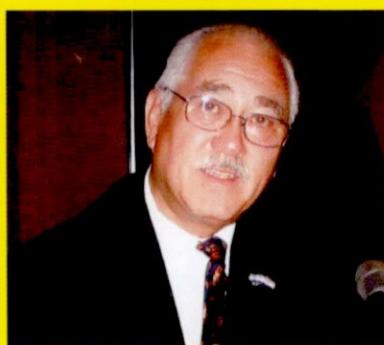
Robert Sabia



Tess Koncick



Matt Wittmann



Archie Chan

week show. CHF presented a street parade at the Indiana State Fair and has received a \$560,000 grant to work on the South Barn. One of the goals is to create an endowment fund to support CHF.

"The Legacy of Alberto Zoppe" was the topic of Rick Purdue's video presentation which showed Alberto on the Greatest Show on Earth, his complete act as seen on Kellogg's Super Circus, and his induction into the Sarasota Ring of Fame in 2007 with biographical remarks. A promotional video showed a new generation of Zoppes and a new riding act, the Riding Zoppes. There was also a video of the backyard and bloopers plus one of a day in Chicago depicting a violent rainstorm. Finally, Giovanni Zoppe fielded questions from the audience.

In Monday's final session Steve Gossard spoke on the history, status, and future plans for the Illinois State University's circus collection at the Millner Library.

On Tuesday morning Al Stencell, Canadian circus owner well known for his keen wit, quickly modified his original topic "Circus Ownership or Shooting Craps the Hard Way" and instead read from his new book on sideshows. Stencell first discussed the money made by 10 in 1 operators. He related how lecturers had to sell or "pitch" things, and the importance of spiels was emphasized. He used the example of the "running mice" pitch and pitches by freaks. Further, packaged candy was cited as a lucrative pitch as were printed biographies of freaks. Other good sellers were photo cards, giant's rings, sex hygiene booklets, magic and ventriloquism manuals, and miniature Bibles. Then Stencell covered grift, the topic of another chapter in his book. Most circuses carried grift, not just small shows. All circuses carried "legal adjusters" who were often necessary because of kootch shows intended for "men only." Finally Stencell touched on the music of Dixieland bands, Hawaiian troupes, and minstrels.

Joe Parker of Dallas made a brief presentation entitled "Wilson's Great World Circus, August 1883—the Volcano, a Very Small Elephant, and the Cannonball King." Krakatoa was

Tom Dunwoody spoke on the fiftieth anniversary plans of Peru, Indiana's Circus City Festival in 2009 and the Circus Hall of Fame. He outlined Peru circus history from 1884 when Ben Wallace entered the

circus business to 1944 when the American Circus Corporation farm was sold by Ringling. Today only five buildings are left. Dunwoody reported that the Circus Hall of Fame had a good year in 2007 with a three

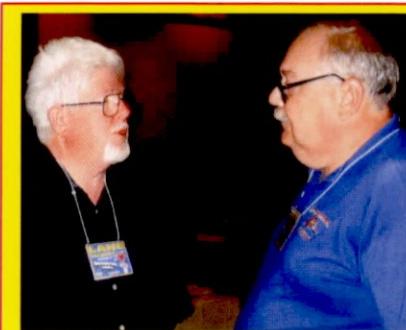
a volcano that erupted, the effect of which reached Batavia while Wilson's Circus was there. The show had a very small elephant, and Holtum was the cannonball king—hence the topic's title.

Ernest Albrecht spoke on creating the contemporary circus based on his book *The Contemporary Circus* which emphasized the circus as a legitimate art form with examples such as Imre Kiralfy, the 1942 Ringling-Barnum show's use of George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky, and the use of scripts, scores, scenic effects, elaborate costumes, and librettos. Albrecht noted that today Ringling-Barnum sets aside four weeks of rehearsal in Tampa, preceded by endless production meetings culminating in the white model meeting attended by all staff, management and marketing personnel in Palmetto, Florida.

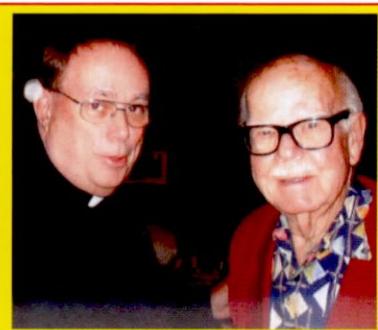
Cirque du Soleil, on the other hand, is in preparation for about nine months or more. Each Cirque show has a new cast, creates new acts and trains artists. Albrecht stated that Ringling briefly flirted with the concept of ensemble acts. Ringling's Bello and Bo performance was used as a case study in Albrecht's book. The Big Apple Circus, however, works for seven weeks in its Walden, New York quarters. All of these shows are created by collaborative teams. Kenneth Feld, of course, as Ringling producer and sole investor can "call the shots" and accept or reject the efforts of the director.

The use of music was cited as another aspect of the contemporary American circus, and Albrecht further suggested that some current shows have a plot and characters. Still other aspects are the emergence of the clown as a prominent feature, growing use of market research, and the proliferation of circus schools. His conclusions were that the circus has become more humane, and that it will continue to be reinvented and will thus change.

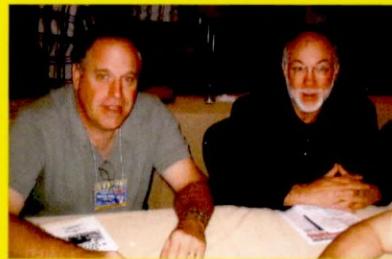
After another tasty lunch, Fred Pfening III took to the podium where he talked on the "Internet Research Revolution" and the availability of research resources on the internet, focusing especially 19th century newspapers. A hundred million



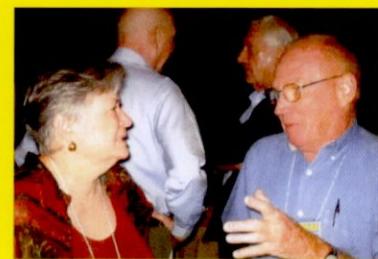
Lane Talburt and John Polacsek



Jerry Hogan and Fred Pfening



Steve Freese and Ellsworth Brown



Kristin Spangenberg and Herb Ueckert

pages of such newspapers are on the internet! Using a Power Point presentation, he showed numerous examples of circus articles discovered on the web site Newspaperarchive.com. It was a fascinating and awesome presentation with mind boggling possibilities!

Tess Koncick of the Ringling Museum in Sarasota followed by noting the museum's 60th anniversary is in 2008. She gave additional historical background about the museum, including comments on the backyard exhibition that opened in 1966 and the Tibbals Learning Center that opened in January 2006. The library is in the process of digitizing posters, photographs, glass negatives, costumes, and heralds. She also explained the five year plan including the restoration of John Ringling's railroad car. Future plans also call for traveling exhibitions, the gathering of oral histories, the replacement of the original Circus Museum and the inclusion of a performance center.

John Polacsek gave an interesting and detailed account of the incorporation of a Connecticut circus. He sorted business records from 1894-1916 of the Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Show Co.

Doyle Ott, who attended the Clown

Conservatory in San Francisco and holds a Ph. D. in theater from Arizona State University, spoke about youth circuses in a social and historical context with special emphasis on "circus play" as a precursor to more structured educational activity.

Wednesday brought the final round of first rate presentations. Robert Unterreiner told the audience about when "It Was Circus Time in the Big Apple." Using slides he talked about his childhood memories of circus in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s, focusing mainly on Ringling-Barnum. Madison Square Garden was explained in depth, as were the logistics of getting the show train to New York City. He commented on the history of Ringling's New York City appearances and its under-canvas dates in Brooklyn from 1931 to 1938. His slides showed menageries, wild west, and clown alley scenes, and the New York Hippodrome where the musical Jumbo debuted and where Cole Bros. Circus appeared in 1937. Hagenbeck Wallace appeared in New York City in 1933, and other area entertainment included the Palisades Amusement Park Circus, Coney Island circuses, the WPA Circus, and the Moscow Circus which exhibited

in Madison Square Garden in 1970.

Richard Georgian's paper "Black America—Gigantic Exhibition of Negro Life and Character" was an interesting and thorough analysis of this show. "Black America" was a two hour performance and a truly gigantic exhibition owned by Nate Salsbury in 1895. A huge grandstand was constructed at Ambrose Park in Brooklyn. The show also played Boston with an amazing cast of 600 and then became a traveling show with somewhat fewer performers. The program consisted of bands, singing by a chorus, a cakewalk by twenty couples, acrobatics, boxers, wire walkers, jugglers, buck and wing dancing (the predecessor to tap dancing), and much more. The show closed November 30, never to appear again.

Ellsworth Brown of the Wisconsin Historical Society and Steve Freese, new Director of Circus World Museum, gave a lengthy presentation on the status of Circus World Museum, an institution dear to the hearts of all circus historians. Freese told of his background and experience, especially in the field of fund raising which has translated into funds to spruce up the non-historical buildings and restore wagons. Freese pointed out that promotion, programming, and marketing were all receiving attention, especially in reaching out to children and groups such as veterans and their families. The circus of chefs was a very successful event as was a recent private birthday party. He also told of a special day to honor Jimmy "Happy" Williams, long time CWM clown.

Goals included repainting the ring barn and restoring the train shed as were plans to capitalize on the National Landmarks program using grant applications. Freese indicated that attendance and revenues were up with grandparents with grandchildren and young parents with their children being the two primary visitor groups. He pointed out, contrary to rumor, that the library endowment still exists, and he stressed the availability of the library and archival collection. He concluded by outlining the 2008 CWM circus performance.

In the afternoon Carolyn Bowers gave a detailed account of Agnes Lake's life and career based on her forthcoming book, co-authored with the late Linda A. Fisher, *Agnes Lake: Queen of the Circus, Wife of a Legend*. Agnes and William Lake owned Lake & Co.'s Hippo-Olympiad, and when Bill Lake was murdered in Missouri in 1869 Agnes, at age 43, found herself the proprietor of the show which she managed successfully. The show toured the South, and she performed in the ring as an equestrienne. Bowers noted the wide use of balloon ascensions in the 1870s. In 1871 Agnes ventured west, using the railroad for transportation. Lake can rightfully take her place as a premier female circus business woman.

Noted circus historian Fred Dahlinger documented the Ringling-Barnum Circus's relocation to Florida in "Snowballs to Baseballs: Ringling Moves from Wisconsin to Florida." Early on, showmen toured the South in the late fall and winter months, the first circus reaching Florida in 1833. Circus layovers in Florida commenced in the 1890s. Visits to Sarasota clinched John Ringling's decision to move the show there in 1927. The resulting impact on Sarasota was huge.

Noel Daniel in her "A View of the Expanded Golden Age of the Circus" spoke about her new book, a lush, illustrated history of circus from the 1860s to the 1950s containing nine chapters, each with an accompanying essay. Visual culture, photography, and design will certainly be strong points of the book as she gathered no less than 30,000 images—1,000 of which will appear in the book. She left those in the audience lusting after this publication for which they may need to save their money as it is very expensive!

Robert Sabia concluded the day's session by continuing his opening presentation "Ringling Revisited on a Wafer." There were more backyard scenes from the 1940s and 1950s. An outdoor performance for St. Martha's Church in Sarasota in either 1939 or 1940 was shown, as were scenes taken in Madison Square Garden in 1950.

Members of C.H.S. had an oppor-

tunity to catch their breaths and cut up a few more jackpots during the cocktail hour preceding the banquet which featured Archie Chan, formerly Corporate Director of Concessions for Feld Entertainment as speaker. Chan, who began his circus career as a musician, regaled the audience with his intimate account of his career. Among the highlights of his talk were comments on the changes in past decades of circus music and circuses in general. He related his childhood experiences, his friendship with Boom Boom Browning, the trials and tribulations of his first circus, his entry into the concession business, his season with Clyde Bros. Circus, his experiences on Ringling-Barnum's Blue unit, Holiday on Ice, Jim Nordmark's show, working the concession stand for Siegfried & Roy, and finally his promotion to Sales Manager with Feld Entertainment and his retirement in Las Vegas in 1994. Needless to say Chan received a warm ovation from his audience who enjoyed this fitting conclusion to an excellent convention.

Following is the list of persons who attended the convention: Ernest Albrecht, Jim Baker, Charles Bellatti, William and Jan Biggerstaff, Carrie Bowers, Lauren Bowers, Ellsworth Brown, Hovey Burgess, Niles "Buddy" Calhoun, Alan Campbell, Jerry Cash, Fred Dahlinger, Noel Daniel, John Diesso, Tom Dunwoody, Walter and Dorita Estes, Guy Fiorenza, James and Joanne Foster, Steve Freese, Al Garner, Richard Georgian, Steve Gossard, Gavin Griffith, Ray Gronso, Michael Haynes, Fr. Jerry Hogan, LaVahn Hoh, Paul Ingrassia, Tess Koncick, Pat Long, Doyle Ott, Joe Parker, Fred Pfening III, Fred Pfening, Jr., John Polacsek, Rick and Paula Purdue, Richard Reynolds III, Dale and Evelyn Riker, Robert and Susan Sabia, Bill and Marte Slout, Kristin Spangenberg, Robert and Jean Spivey, Al and Shirley Stencell, Lane Talburt, Gordon Taylor, John Thiele, Herbert B. Ueckert, Robert Unterreiner, Matthew Wittmann and Todd Woolf.

Any errors or omissions in this report are unintentional and are the responsibility of this writer.

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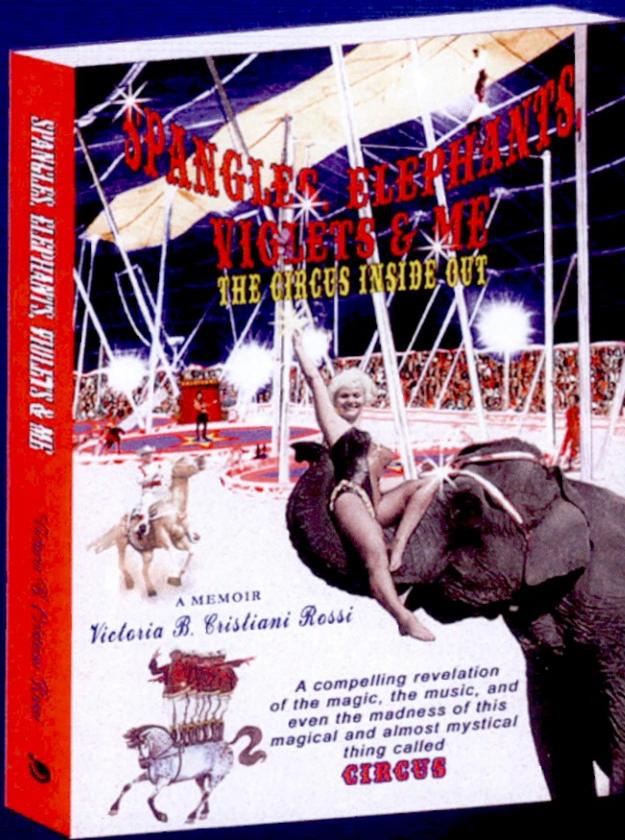
--David P. Orr,
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Here are some High Steppin' Candy Butchers on John Robinson in the early 1920s. Some things never change. My job with the Cole Bros. Circus in 1946 and 1947 was to put up a menagerie stand exactly like this one while the other butchers were humpin' lumber for the seats in the big top. I was a big kid at twelve and could do it easily. Once you got the counters set up with about a half dozen jacks, you were in business. Looks like this is the same type of oil skin table cloth as I used, and I built up an identical display out of Cracker Jack boxes. The one thing I didn't like was that I had to wipe the counter a lot when the elephants threw dirt on a dusty lot. Sometimes it even got into the bug juice.

Speaking of elephants, I'm sure a lot of people, even showfolks, don't know that on a railroad circus the daily routine for the elephants and baggage horses was just the opposite of everyone else. When the horses had finished loading the train at night they were loaded into the stock

cars still wearing their harnesses so they could immediately return to work when unloaded in the morning. Once the show was up, they had their own tent where the harnesses were removed. They were washed down and they spent the rest of the day eating and sleeping. The same applied to the elephants although they didn't have to do the amount of work the baggage stock was required to do. If you went into the menagerie between shows the whole herd would be down and asleep.

Our second photo shows part of the John Robinson big show band lined up for spec in the early 1920s. Looks like they had an Egyptian theme that year. After completing spec and remounting the bandstand they would shed these awful looking things and resume playing the show. Whoever laid out the lot didn't account for the telephone pole in the mid-

dle of the back door.

When the Rudolf Valentino craze swept the nation it not only supplied us with "Hindustan," "Sheik of



Araby," and a lot of other hot dance steps, it gave circuses an excuse to use these bathrobe type things for the animal people. The best feature was that one size fits everybody. I wore one 35 years later when I helped Harry Haag, Jr. lead Jack Joyce's camels.

Next we have Gee Gee Engesser, the Blonde Bombshell, at the Cole Bros. Circus winter quarters at the Louisville, Kentucky fairgrounds prior to the opening of the 1945 season. Zack Terrell loved horses and maintained first class horse trainers and high-line horseflesh. This is the wheel team, also known as wheelers, that would be the anchor for the sixteen horse hitch that would thunder around the hippodrome track. I remember it as though it were yesterday.

Gee Gee was multi-talented, having been raised on Shell Bros. Circus owned by her father George Engesser. She remains active in show biz today; in fact, I chatted with her on the phone recently. Bill Powell, her son, runs the broad mob on the Ringling show, and if that's not enough, she and John Herriott are first cousins, John's mother being the sister of George Engesser.

The last photo is of the elephant Lucy on the Seils-Sterling Circus in the 1930s. She could be a pretty tough customer. You may notice she has a "club foot." The lady at the right is Verna Lindeman, wife of one of the show's owners.

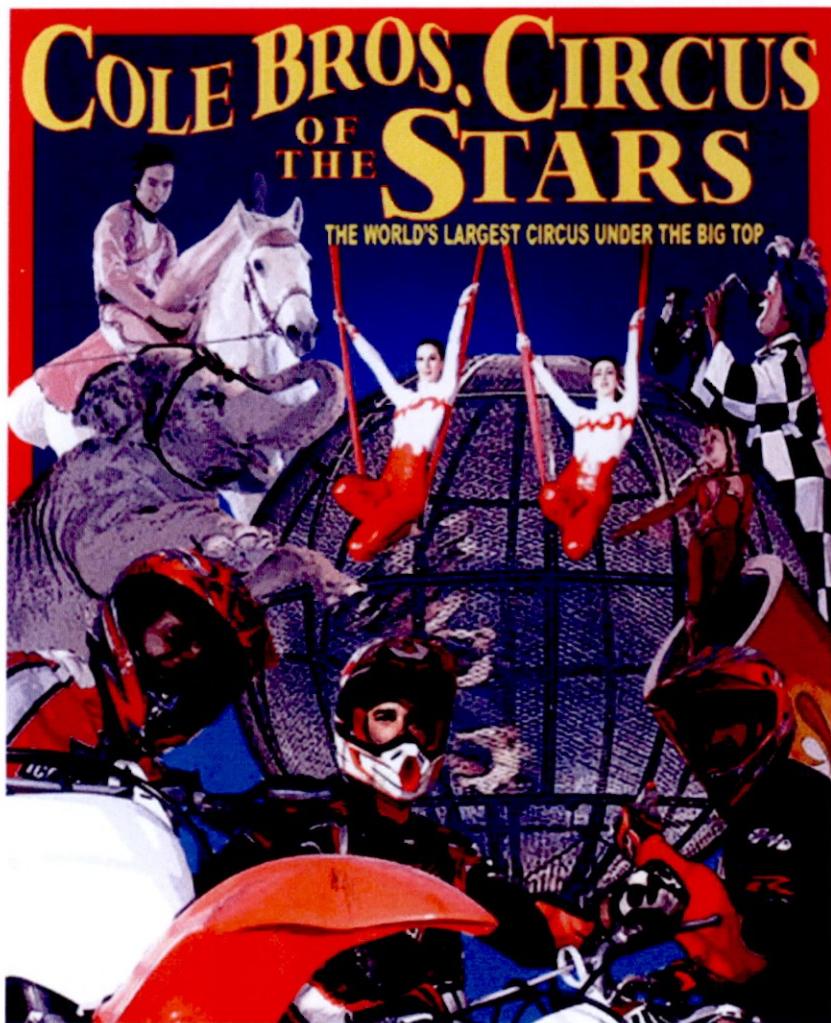
Smokey Jones knew Lucy well from their days together on the Dailey show in the late 1940s. He commented that she was the cleverest elephant he



was ever around. Someone had taught her a lot of mundane things like folding up baling wire, taking off a person's hat and gently replacing it, etc. He said that Art Eldridge, the old showman, once saw him demonstrating this feat and said "Hell, I go back 20 years with that elephant," whereupon he threw down his Panama hat and said "Pick it up!" Lucy picked it up and ate it.

She could be very treacherous. Elephant men knew if you got too rough with her in the act she would simply back up to the back of the ring and square off. You had no choice but to quickly go to the next trick and she would be all right. She was the same way when she was working in harness in a team. She was always the off-lead and if you attempted to pull more than she cared to pull, she would reach up and knock you off the lead elephant.

Lucy got around a lot. Here's a recap of her career: 1918-1919, William P. Hall's farm; 1920-1923, Campbell Bros. 2 car show; 1924, J. H. Berry's independent act; 1925-1930, Bill Ketrow's Kay Bros. Circus; 1931-1938, Seils Sterling; 1939-1941, Lincoln Park Zoo in Los Angeles; 1942, Jack Joyce's independent act; 1943-1944, Clyde Beatty-Russell Bros. Circus; 1945-1950, Ben Davenport's Dailey Bros. Circus; 1951-1956, Cappell Bros. Circus; 1957-1958, Gran Circo Union in Mexico. She died in January 1958.



Seasons Greetings

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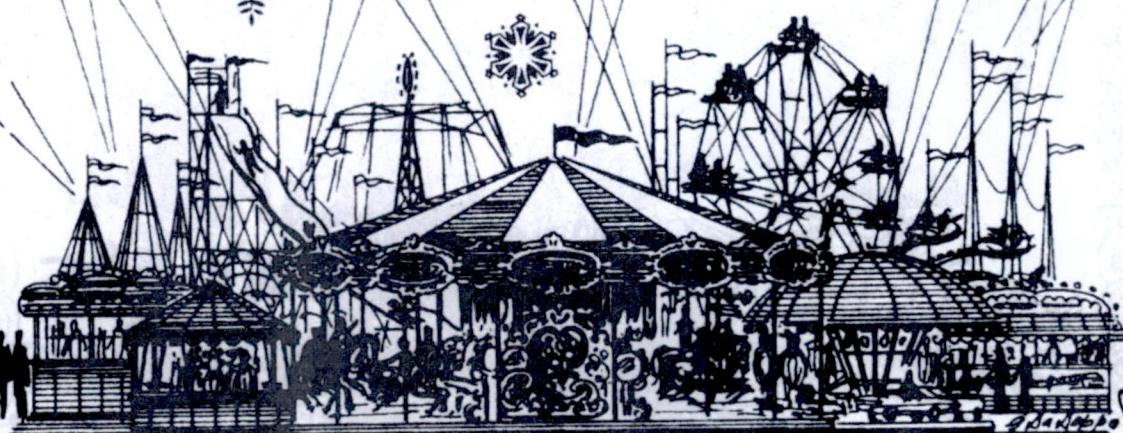
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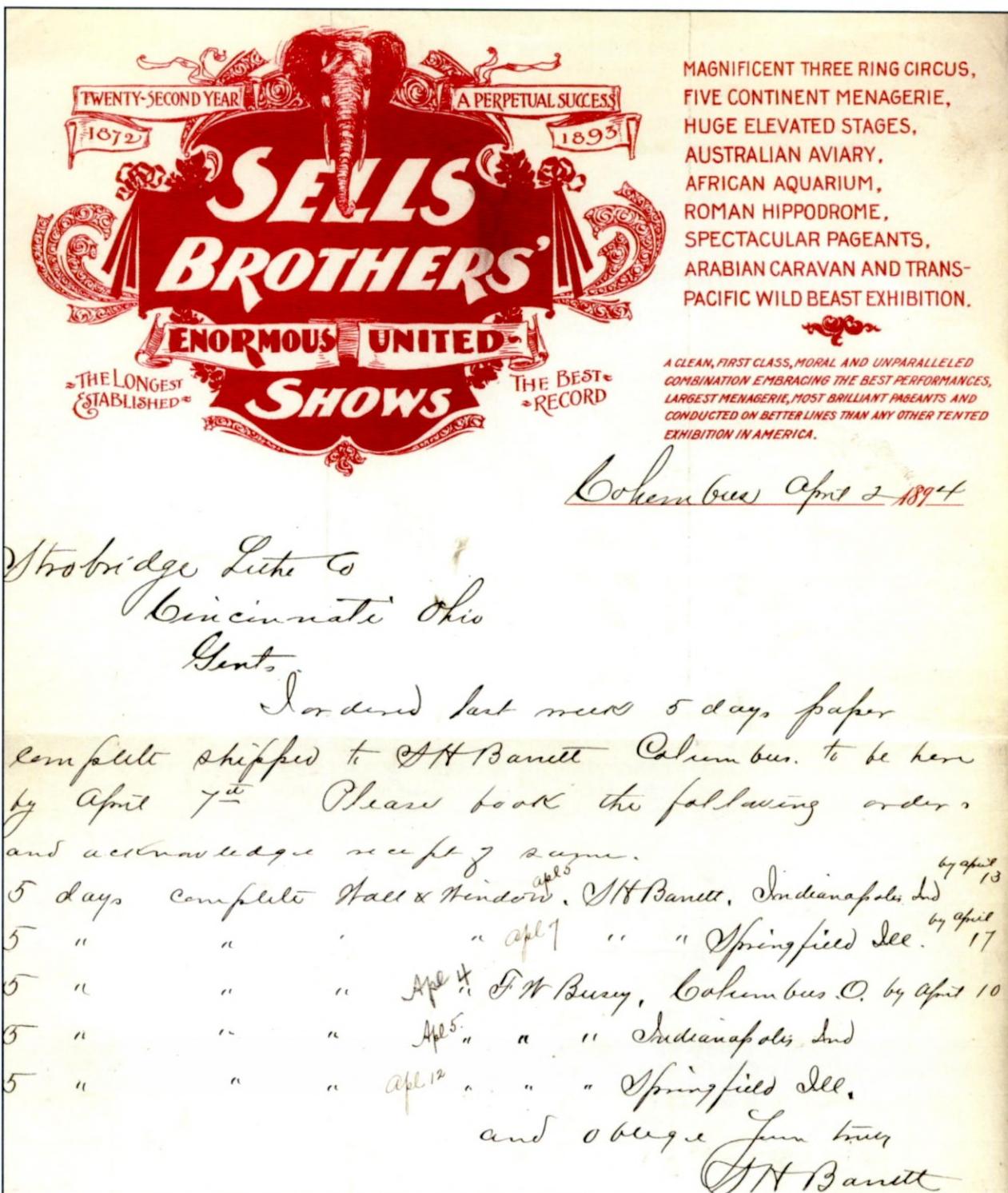
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Happy Holidays!

JIM ELLIOTT
GENERAL MANAGER



Bill Kaiska's Letterheads



This letterhead was used by Sells Bros. Circus in 1894, two years before the show was combined with Adam Forepaugh. It is signed by S. H. Barrett, a brother-in-law to the Sells brothers.

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THE FRONT COVER

Technical advances in printing, a softening of middle-class attitudes toward children, increased affluence, urbanization, and the circus's growing awareness that it was essentially entertainment for children, all conspired to produce a mini-boom in circus-themed children's books in the 1880s. The one on this month's cover is the best of the lot. Co-authored by P. T. Barnum and Sarah J. Burke, who surely did all the work, the book measures about 10" x 13", and has 28 pages. It contains superbly lithographed images provided by Strobridge of circus scenes, including well-executed depictions of acts, many in color. Overall, it conveys the energy, excitement, artistry and beauty that made circus the most popular entertainment in late nineteenth century America. This volume was published by White & Allen of New York and London in 1888.

For the most part, books of this nature have been overlooked by collectors and scholars. They deserve a

better fate as all of them have realistic and accurate illustrations of circus life that offer insights into costumes, tricks, apparatus, and other aspects of the performance unavailable elsewhere. Original in Pfening Archives.

2008 CHS CONVENTION

CHS President Robert Sabia announced the 2008 Circus Historical Society convention will be held at the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts, September 22 to 24. The Hanneford show will be there.

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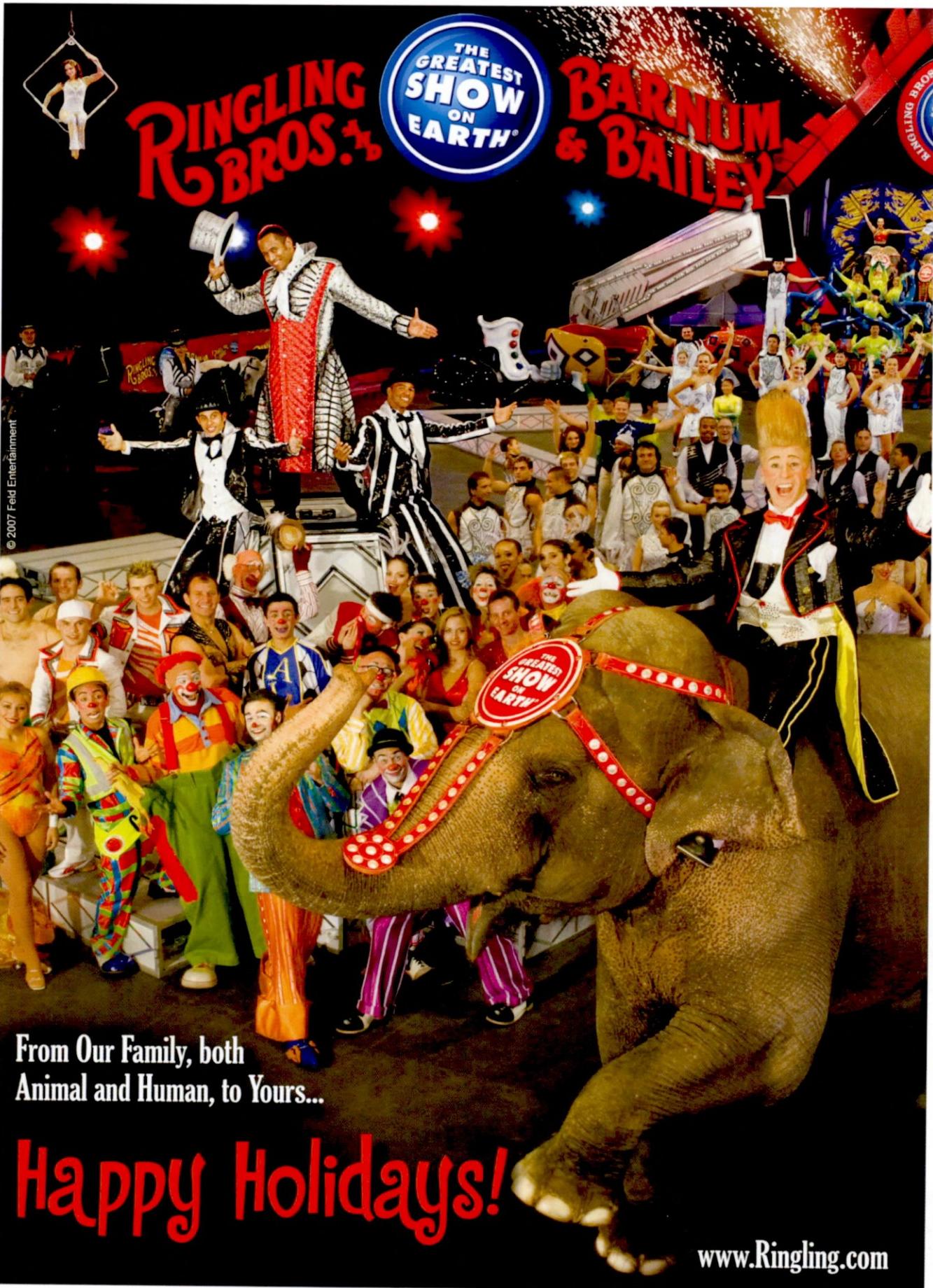
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